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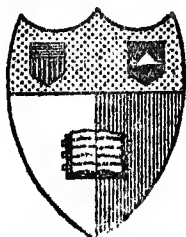
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THE OWL & THE MOON

Marion
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The Owl and The Moon

By
Marion Osmond

"The Owl sighs for the Moon."—*Malay Proverb*



This Novel was closely in the running for the John
Long £500 Prize (1921) for the Best First Novel

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The Owl and the Moon

CHAPTER I

THE PAWANG

WHEN Jim Rendell alighted from his car at the front door of the "Bungalow," an old brown man, dressed in a short sarong, with a silk handkerchief tied round his head, leapt from behind some shrubs and threw himself at the feet of the rubber planter:

"My father, my father," he chanted.

"What now, you old devil-raiser?" said the planter, impatiently, giving him a kick. Jim Rendell was tired and hot, and thirsty, for it was six o'clock. His working day was ended, and here was the old p^hawang—the wizard, to whom periodically he paid dollars in order that he might entice the evil spirits away from his plantations—twining a pair of lean arms round his feet. It was necessary to charm bad spirits

from the rubber fields, or the coolies would refuse to work, but here . . .

"My father," intoned the ancient in his wailing voice, "the evil ones encroach on your dwelling. They will work harm and misery for many. Grant that I lure them away."

"I can't have you howling outside my house, with your beastly incantations," said the planter, giving him another kick, "here's a dollar to go away. Go quickly, or I'll have you hanged in Singapore—you know why."

"My father has a bitter tongue," murmured the old Malay, and, in a moment, like a swift animal, he disappeared between the shrubs. At the back of the house, across the compound, were the servants' quarters. Here he joined the amah, a pretty Malay girl who acted as Mrs. Rendell's maid, and Ching, the Chinese house-boy, who was tormenting his mistress's pet monkey with a pin on the end of a stick. The pâwang looked sternly at him.

"Infidel! His honour has returned. Go—quickly," he commanded.

The Chinese boy flourished the stick, and then deemed it wiser to "go" in search of his master.

"Did he pay?" asked the amah.

"Not enough."

"I will ask him to-morrow. I will tell him I am afraid. *Is there an evil spirit?*"

"There is an evil spirit," replied the p^âwang, and, drawing an imaginary circle round him with his forefinger, he seated himself cross-legged on the wooden floor and began to chant a mysterious incantation. Most of it was Sanskrit in origin, and was as unintelligible to the listening Malays as it was to the old man himself. The butler and the amah stood, hypnotised by the rhythmic monotony of sound. The Chinese cook, who, with his assistant, was busy preparing dinner, cursed the old wizard in his own tongue.

"I see, I see, I see," intoned the p^âwang.

"Tell us what you see," begged the amah.

"I see love and hate, and hate and love, and jealousy, and treachery, and murder," sang the old man.

"These things are common," sniffed the Chinese cook to his assistant. "They happen every day and everywhere."

The p^âwang continued to chant and to look before him with glazed eyes. Presently Ching, the house-boy, came and joined the audience. He gazed at the amah. She aroused feelings in him which were strange and new. They were

tumultuous, even murderous. He looked at her so long and so steadily that she protested.

"The young infidel has the evil eye," she said.

The boy turned his evil eye on the p  wang instead. He felt as though the girl had bitten him with a poisoned tongue. He would have liked to pull out her tongue. Failing that, he would gladly have pulled out the tongue of the old man who was sitting there making sounds which offended his ears. He remembered that the master of the house had kicked the p  wang. So he also kicked the p  wang, and sent him rolling off his balance.

There was a great outcry, and presently Ching's voice was added to the lamentations, for, with the aid of a groom who joined the *mel  e*, the butler administered chastisement. The yells of the Chinese boy, mingled with the protestations of the cook, brought Jim Rendell on the scene.

"What the devil's all this?" he asked the butler, for the amah and the p  wang disappeared with almost miraculous speed. "If the boy needs it, *I'll* thrash him; don't you dare to interfere. What's he done?"

"Your honour, he insulted the Malay girl."

"I looked at her," said Ching.

"Then don't look again," said the master of

the house. "It'll take you all your time to look at the work you've got to do. There'll be a bit more than you have had lately. Keep you occupied and out of mischief. Understand?"

The boy listened in silence.

"Your honour has merely to state his wishes," returned the butler.

When his master had gone, the butler complained to the cook: "Four guests staying in the house, and for several weeks," he said.

"It seems without reason," admitted the cook. "What are they going to do?"

"How do I know? Ask the p^hawang what they are going to do."

"I do not believe in your p^hawang," said the Chinese cook scornfully.

"Hush! Here he comes."

"These people," said the p^hawang, who now returned to the compound, "will be sorry they came here."

"Why will they be sorry?"

"There is an evil spirit," he said, and, sitting on the floor again, he began his incantations anew.

CHAPTER II

ROSES

JIM RENDELL'S house, surrounded by twelve acres of ground near Prang, resembled rather a rajah's palace than the bungalow *de luxe* it actually was. The friend from whom he had bought it—with all the treasures it contained—had named it Bamboo Grove, because it occupied the site where a Chinese bungalow once stood. A pavilion remained in the garden—a pavilion which may have been designed to recall the "pleasure tower" of the "King of Tang"—now used as a rather neglected summer-house, which had the reputation of being haunted. The "bungalow" itself was filled with *objets d'art* from all parts of the East—Caireen rugs, silver from Perak, gold from Sumatra, embroideries from Kelantan and Java, porcelain, ivories and bronzes from Hong Kong, Nankin china, Canton enamel, and turquoise blue cloisonné looted from the summer palace at Pekin. The Rendells' newly arrived guest, Lady Harbury,

looked round at the splendid furnishings of her spacious bedroom with delight—and a little envy—for she had the taste and the *flair* of the collector.

“What money can do!” she sighed.

Brilliantly bordered curtains woven of Kelantan silk, divided the room from the veranda, where a green reed blind shut out the sun. An electric fan cooled the air.

“The climate has been much exaggerated,” thought Lady Harbury, and she was wondering where her husband’s room was, when, to her surprise, she heard his voice:

“Hallo, Ginger!”

“Hallo!” fluted a girl’s voice in return.

Lady Harbury listened with bated breath. The voice of her husband sounded from an adjoining room; the girl’s voice came from below.

“Do give me one,” it begged. “I’m thirsty.”

“Come up here then.”

“Right you are!”

Lady Harbury judged it time to interfere. She walked towards the veranda.

“Gerald!” she called, in an imperious voice. He came slowly from somewhere on the right—evidently his room opened on to the same veranda

as her own—and stood sans coat and waistcoat, with his hands in his trousers pockets, regarding her with the air of a sulky schoolboy.

“What’s the matter now?” he asked.

“Only that I wish you would pull up that green reed blind for me, please,” she said pleasantly.

“You know I can’t—mechanical and foreign contrivances! Aren’t there plenty of amahs, house-boys, and all that sort of kind of people about? Isn’t there an electric bell? Why, look here!” and he pressed a button, which was immediately answered by a servant, at whose entrance Gerald effected his escape.

Lady Harbury sighed. Gerald assumed the attitude that she was always rebuking him, which she assured herself she was not. She only wanted him to be careful at the outset of their sojourn in Prang. Jim Rendell was an old friend of his, who, she hoped, might find him a post, something easy and remunerative, in chandu, for instance, or in tin, or rubber. . . .

The servant who answered the bell brought in a silver tray laden with bottles, glasses, ice, soda-water and purple cocktails, for it was after six o’clock, at which hour in Prang one feels one must drink or die.

"Please open that blind for me," said the lady.

The servant obeyed her, and then slipped noiselessly from the room. Lady Harbury walked deliberately beyond the Kelantan curtains, and saw first of all that a green blind had been closed sideways on her husband's retreat. She was in full possession of her part of the veranda, and she stood for a few moments admiring the view. Before her stretched the lawn, the shrubs, palms, ferns, and flowers of Jim Rendell's garden. Heavier trees hid the drive, beyond which were distant hills, and to the right a strip of dazzling sand and the blue, still sea. At that moment she wished she were an artist that she might be able to reproduce the almost incommunicable thrill of the colours before her. Stepping further on the veranda, she leaned on the balcony rail and looked down. Just below her window stood a young man, gazing in the direction leading from the house. She liked the firm mouth and well-cut chin—she could just see beneath the double-brimmed hat he wore. Was he looking for Ginger? Impulsively she spoke: "Is that the way she went?"

He started and looked up. His light grey eyes and dark brows and lashes were a combination Lady Harbury would have chosen for herself

had she been granted a voice in the matter at her birth.

"She?"

"As though you didn't know; Ginger I heard her called."

"Oh!" smiled the young man, albeit in a protesting way. "Ginger! That glorious Titian gold!"

"Well, I didn't see her, you know."

"I hardly saw her either; she was there, and then, when I came out, she was gone. As she was garbed in white and wore no hat, I was wondering if she were real, or—a phantom."

"I think she was real," said Lady Harbury, "but—a phantom! You speak as though you believed seriously in such a thing. I am so interested in phantoms. We must talk. I shall see you again no doubt. . . . You are staying here?"

"Yes."

At this moment the reed blind which separated Lady Harbury from her husband ascended with a snap, and Gerald stood before her, monocled, groomed, and dressed.

"Let me introduce my husband, Sir Gerald Harbury . . . Mr. —"

"Logan."

Gerald nodded carelessly in return to the young man's salute.

"But you'll be late for dinner," he said, propelling his wife into the room. "Rose, I'm surprised at you—you, baby snatching."

"Baby snatching! Why, the young man's staying here. . . ."

"That makes it worse."

"And Ginger isn't staying here at all; she may . . ."

"I say," interrupted her husband, looking at his watch, "you *will* be late for dinner. Look what you're in, too—is that a tropical tea frock? I could get it into my waistcoat pocket—not suitable for the veranda."

"Enough said, Gerald," interrupted Lady Harbury. "I did forget I wasn't properly garbed even for a veranda, although it seems people *do* get a bit careless in these climates; you yourself . . ."

"Cherio!" said Gerald quickly, and escaped.

Lady Harbury surveyed herself in the mirror. It was true her *négligé* was a filmy diaphanous affair, but the young man who had spoken to her from below her window had looked up into *her eyes*. He was not like Gerald, who scanned a woman as he would a horse, for points. She

thought sorrowfully how few men look at the eyes, and through these windows to the soul. If one is handsome, they are satisfied ; if one is not handsome—they don't look. She was considered beautiful by some people ; being tall and slim, with electric hair and clear, hazel eyes. She had a restless mind, concealed by a bland manner. Manners she valued more than morals, and taste still more than either ; and with these qualities, added to pride, she managed to achieve a "blameless life." She was regarded as cold, but no one in her set suspected her of being "brainy," and they would have been surprised to learn that she was discontented.

Putting aside the black dinner dress she had intended to wear, she opened the door of her trunk-wardrobe in order to select something more alluring, and decided on a rose-coloured brocade gown with a silver thread in it. It swathed her slim figure, and by an artful device revealed—occasionally—an elegant leg (in silk stocking to match the gown) almost to the knee. With the dress she wore a necklace of garnets. In one of the small drawers with which the trunk was fitted she found a rose, one of the Mayfair flower-makers' roses, lifelike and perfumed, and pinned it on the bodice of her dress. As Gerald

would say, she had "done her silliest." Why? She was in the land of light and colour, and the glamour of it was blown suddenly across her soul.

In the lounge, a splendid apartment forty feet square, Lady Harbury looked round to see if "Ginger" also was among the guests. Incidentally she caught Gerald's monocled eye obviously scanning the room with the same intent. He looked disappointed. "Ginger" was not there. But she was no phantom; Gerald had seen her and there were not *three* people *en rapport* to that point of seeing and hearing.

Annabel, Jim Rendell's wife, a lively person many years younger than her husband, golden-haired, blue-eyed, with well-blackened eyelashes and a complexion enhanced with Coty's rouge, wore what looked like the skirt of a ballerina, suspended by two strings of sapphires. She always wore daring Parisian clothes, whereby she created conversation among women and annoyance among men, who were so often disappointed to find she was not "up" to her clothes. But Annabel was happy so long as she was talked about. Slander? So be it, rather than oblivion. Lady Harbury felt quite tolerantly inclined to like her; moreover, she respected

her because her house was a veritable museum full of precious things.

"I didn't collect them *all*," protested Annabel modestly.

There were only two other guests—Dr. Rendell, the rubber planter's brother, and his nephew, Patrick Logan. They were making a tour of the world after a strenuous time during the war. Patrick, Annabel informed Lady Harbury, had written a book of poems *and* a play, and she continued, "he is also the doctor's secretary, helping him to write a book on . . . something ending in analysis."

"Psycho-analysis."

"That's it."

Dinner at the Bungalow Rendell was a Lucullan feast. Rose-coloured shades made glamorous the polished table, with its fruit and flowers and Chinese silver. The golden wine—Pol Roger—effervesced even in the long stems of the delicately cut champagne glasses. And the cooking! Lady Harbury heard her husband enthusiastically exclaim to his hostess:

"Your cook is really, don't you know, a *cordon bleu*!"

"A Chinaman," corrected Annabel.

Behind each chair stood a white-robed, tur-

baned servant, swift and noiseless to anticipate one's wants. And the perfumed breath of the East was fanned throughout the room, scented with sandal wood and cedar wood and the aromatic polish of the floor. Looking across the table over a mass of crimson flowers, Lady Harbury encountered the gaze of a pair of grey eyes under sombre brows. Just for a moment her soul retreated into an inner silence, and it seemed as though she remembered in a flash another life which was brilliant with the colour of the East, and vivid with strange episodes. Almost in the same flash the memory was gone again, leaving her with a sense of confusion.

Jim Rendell was questioning his brother about psycho-analysis.

"Sort of Christian Science, isn't it?" he queried.

"Don't bring it into disrepute by quoting such an association," said the doctor.

"Seems to me a lot of hot air," said Jim.

Lady Harbury glanced sideways at the doctor. He looked much older than his brother—a little jaded, as though the self-imposed disillusionments of science had left him cold. She ventured a remark:

"Arn't there more mysteries in the human

soul than are dreamt of by psycho-therapy?" she asked.

"That's not a fair question in the middle of dinner," he returned.

"You think you've plumbed them all?" she persisted.

He was silent.

"Heaven help us," said the lady, "if you have."

She looked across at Patrick Logan, and he smiled. "Why ask him?" the smile seemed to say. "You and I *know*."

.

In a room in the servants' quarters the p^hawang fed on curry and subtle dainties from Jim Rendell's table. Meanwhile he discussed, with the butler and the cook, the nasty ways of their employers.

"All Englishmen," said the cook, "have loud voices, red faces, and bad manners."

"They eat too much, and they are always drinking," affirmed the butler.

"They are drunk now," declared the Chinese house-boy who had just come in. "Some female devils and others have arrived, and they are rolling about the room in couples."

"Hush!" commanded the p^hawang, lifting his

hand. From the house came the strains of a gramophone.

"They are dancing," said the butler scornfully. "Their dancing is such as would never be permitted among us. It is ugly and obscene."

"Those who give themselves to these pleasures find death," said the p^âwang solemnly.

"So do we all," protested the butler.

"Not *death*," declared the wizard.

"Your meaning is not clear to me," said the butler.

"Because your understanding is clouded, my friend. You cannot look higher than your heart's desire."

"We were not speaking of heart's desires," complained the other, "but of pleasure which brings death, and that some of us do not die."

"The air around us is filled with the spirits of our ancestors," said the Chinese cook. "That is what he means."

"But spirits are evil," said the butler, looking round apprehensively.

"Those that are near," said the p^âwang.

"I saw one this afternoon," said the Chinese boy, "it was the ghost of a foreign devil, a female devil, with flaming serpents in her hair. She looked

up at the veranda and then floated down the drive."

"Did she float?" asked the pâwang.

"Her feet never touched the ground."

"I shall not stay in this place," said the butler,

"I do not want an evil spirit to enter into me."

"Give me a dollar and I will make it impossible for that to happen."

"Nay," said the butler. "I will wait till I am possessed before I pay a dollar."

"It will be more than a dollar *then*," said the pâwang.

"I shall give notice to his honour in the morning," said the butler.

This was what the pâwang wanted, although he feared the butler would be easily replaced. The Chinese cook and the house-boy, infidels both, were indifferent to the powers of darkness, being themselves without doubt allied to the evil ones. The old wizard although he was a ruffian, and possibly a murderer, was not a charlatan. He not only believed in the spirits he charmed away from the rubber plantations, but he saw them, and was even afraid of them—at times. He was protected, of course, by his arts, but he quailed before the spirits of the Earth, the Air and Water. They were tremendous,

impersonal, terrifying. But such spirits as the house-boy had seen, she with the flaming serpents in her hair; this sort was amenable to his control.

"Are the new people come yet?" he enquired drifting to another subject.

"The people of importance? Yes," answered the butler, "but I do not believe they are what they say they are. There is no politeness shown them, and they speak just as the others speak."

"Foreign devils are like that," affirmed the cook.

"Perhaps they are impostors," suggested the p  wang.

"Maybe."

"The female devil," said the house-boy, "is sitting in the arms of the young man who is staying in the house meanwhile the others dance."

"Does her husband see that?"

"He sees but does not look."

"The ways of Englishmen are strange."

"He himself is rolling about the room in the embrace of a she-devil in a red dress."

"They will attract spirits who will destroy them," said the p  wang solemnly, "there is much need for me to charm them away."

CHAPTER III

VIOLETS

EVERYTHING that can be said has been said about roses. So thought Patrick Logan, after wasting the whole morning trying to write a sonnet about them. The Rose of Sharon—the Roses of Helio-gabolus—the “Roses and Raptures of Vice”—“Roses, Roses all the way”—*ad infinitum*. There ought, of course, to be something left to say about rose-coloured brocade, or about the silk roses made by the girls in Mayfair.

“ . . . fashioned just
To last a lifetime if a flower one must
Keep for remembrance. . . .

Patrick tore up this effort, quite rightly regarding it as slush. He marvelled at his lack of inspiration. And, yet, surely his heart was beating in tune to an unsung song of roses. He meditated on the beauty of rose colour meanwhile with his hand he scribbled unmeaning words. But—rose-coloured brocade—*rose du Barry*.

The colour haunted his mind like a tune, a tune that was set to the praise of dark hair and a thick smooth ivory skin.

Odd that he could not find words for the tune ! He was bewitched by the colour but he was hampered by the word "rose" because it had attracted all the poets since the beginning of the world. Almost he wished that all the poets who had gone before had been suppressed, that their works had been burned, as the library at Alexandria was burned. Then the poet of to-day would have a chance—he would not be weighted with the already said, he would be able to write a poem about roses. His feelings were fresh about roses, but his *thoughts* were jaded—thanks to those others.

He tried to visualise the face of Rose, recalling her hazel eyes which could grow passionately dark under straight reflective brows. With her long full throat and curved mouth she was an Italian type—surely equipped to inspire the sonneteer.

"I gave my soul once in a princelier time . . ."
The lines refused to consummate themselves.
"Rose of yesterday—Rose of to-morrow . . ."
He started suddenly as though waking up from a dream, and stared at the paper on the desk before him.

"What's the matter?" asked Dr. Rendell, who entered the room at that moment. He came and laid his hand affectionately on his nephew's shoulder.

"Automatic writing," laughed Patrick uneasily, pointing to the scribbled sheet of paper.

The doctor looked and saw the word "Violet." "Violet?" he said. "Ah! I remember. The name of that girl you got entangled with in France. A W.A.A.C., wasn't she? Well, I always told you to grasp your nettle. Why didn't you go and see her and finish the affair?"

"Isn't silence the best way of finishing—that sort of affair?"

"I don't know what sort of affair it was," observed the doctor, "but I think to receive letters which you do not answer is a very bad way of dealing with a situation. It is not very courageous either. And you leave the other person an excuse for hoping. Letters may be lost. All sorts of things may be conjured up as reasons why you have not answered. Whereas a clean cut . . ."

"It seems so cruel."

"Not so cruel as the way you have adopted."

"I expect she has forgotten me."

"You mean you *hope* she has forgotten you,

but obviously you have not forgotten her. Unconsciously, the memory of her worries you very much."

"I'll write to her—presently," said Patrick.

"Not presently—now."

"Now, if you like, and will that wipe it out?"

"It rests with you," said the doctor, "and by the way . . . having experienced the trouble caused by . . . that sort of thing . . . *verbum sap sapienti*."

Patrick laughed.

"Are you trying to caution me? Do you mean about Lady Harbury? She and I were friends at once, but it is quite on a different plane from—that other. Her ideas are similar to my own—neo-platonist."

"Ah! I wonder what you mean by neo-platonist?"

Patrick made no reply to this question. He knew of old that it was useless to argue with his uncle, who, being whole-heartedly a psychoanalyst and also a rationalist, did not believe in the soul with its transcendental powers. So he changed the subject.

"I wonder what I must write to Violet," he sighed.

"I can't help you there," said the doctor. "I can only leave you in solitude to do it."

He left him, and Patrick sat staring at a blank sheet of paper, wondering what he *could* write to Violet without being either brutal or banal. He decided that there was nothing to be said. In this as in so many other matters he elected to disagree with the doctor. Silence was the only weapon he could use effectively. He could not bear to hurt either Violet or himself by being definite and direct, and to be ambiguous would be to invite response. So he closed the door of his thoughts on Violet, the more easily because another door was opened wide to Rose.

He tried to write a sonnet to Rose. But the words were jaded—they had all been used too many times. He would not write to Violet, and he could not write about Rose, so he gave up trying to write at all, and, lighting a cigarette instead, gave himself to desultory musing. His thoughts turned to Rose. . . . He wondered if she had married Gerald Harbury because he had looked splendid in a uniform, and had captured her imagination in the atmosphere of war—just as Violet had captured his imagination. Only, happily, he had not married Violet. How sad that one so beautiful as Rose should be thrown

away ! For Gerald had not even money to recommend him ; his estate was mortgaged. A title without money must be a nuisance, thought Patrick, and he felt indignant with Gerald for daring to ask so beautiful a lady to share—a mortgage.

And how bored she must be !

He decided that it was his duty to cheer her up a bit. So, in all good faith, he sauntered forth to do it.

On his way to the lounge, where Rose often sat in the afternoons while others were asleep, he came full tilt against the Malay girl, the amah who acted as Mrs Rendell's maid, and who, now that her mistress had a guest, did double service. Rose had protested, saying she could easily look after herself, she was used to it ; or, if need be, she might get an amah of her own for a few weeks. But Annabel insisted that the amah was " eating her head off " for lack of something to do, so Rose perforce allowed the noiseless brown girl, who filled her with an uncanny sense of indefinable foreboding, to put out her clothes, or to help her to put them on, as seldom as possible. She so much preferred to " arrange " herself. She was sensitive to critical eyes, and as comparative poverty had compelled her to live so many years

without a maid it seemed a pity to cultivate helplessness. Although after all, she argued, Gerald *might* "get rich quick"; he might—he was rather the sort for the rubber fields.

In the square hall which divided the lounge from the portico a pair of curtains hung in closely gathered folds. They were of woven silk embroidered with a gold thread, the prevailing colour being purple. In the centre a conventional pattern was designed in different shades of heliotrope merging into a deep violet. Patrick stopped to look at the curtains for they were really beautiful (made in Trengganu), but the colour! . . . He had an almost superstitious feeling that Violet pursued him. Her mind, he supposed, had travelled along some wireless path, to reach his own tormentingly. Briefly he wondered if she represented Fate; something he couldn't get away from. He felt almost frightened by the thought, and it stimulated his resolve to cheer up Rose Harbury. . . . It was at this juncture that the amah, gliding swiftly as though her feet scarcely touched the ground, ran into him. In order to prevent either of them from stumbling he put out his arms and held her for a very few seconds. She was so close to him that he could have heard her throbbing heart

had he listened, but his mind was divided between Violet and Rose, and he looked down on her for a moment with the detached air of one who regards a new type of animal.

"Hope I didn't hurt you," he said, with a kind smile.

The amah looked up at him. He showed white teeth when he smiled, his voice had a timbre which was different from the rather raucous note of command she associated with Englishmen. His face was browned, not red; he had eyes that gave her an unaccustomed thrill. All the Malay love-songs she had heard echoing along the river came into her mind. She tried to speak, but found a lump in her throat. Patrick thought he had frightened her, and quickly let go his hands. The girl slipped away like a ghost. She ran breathlessly into the compound.

"After this," she said, "I shall always wear my jewels."

"Which jewels?" sneered Ching, the house-boy, who always seemed to be near wherever the amah was.

"Did I speak to you, infidel?"

"You spoke. Was it to the air, or have you a familiar spirit, black face?"

"Black is *my* face? Yours is yellow, dog!"

She went into her room and put on a chain of beads, a pair of bracelets, and a pair of gold ear-rings. She also powdered her face, and, having done this, emerged in a better temper.

"Boy, take tea into the lounge for two," she commanded.

Ching objected.

"It is not my business."

"It is your business when there is no one else at hand. Tea drinking in this house is unusual; only when visitors are here is it done. The woman with the ugly face desires it, she asked me for it."

"Then take it," said the boy.

"If I do so," returned the amah, "you shall be thrashed. I will tell his honour a few things I know of—you are a thief! Shall I tell him? . . ."

Ching hurried to his own compatriot, the Chinese cook, who gave him a tray with tea and small cakes and sweets on it.

When he returned to the compound the amah was telling her fortune by means of a disc on which a number of pictures were painted and which could be sent spinning on a small pivot. When it stopped, the picture directly opposite the spinner indicated an event which might be interpreted literally or otherwise, according to the fancy of the enquirer. The picture which faced the

Malay girl was that of a crocodile with threatening jaws.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Ching, "you shall be food for the crocodiles."

"Monster!" said the girl, but she waxed thoughtful. Presently :

"Do they drink tea?" she asked.

"They?" said the Chinese boy, looking at her intently. He perceived that she was unduly interested in the pair in the lounge. "These two," he said, with a fiendish grin, "sit on the same chair; they look into each other's eyes; his arm is round her—so."

He put his arm round the Malay girl, and she shuddered beneath his touch.

"That woman," she cried, "is old and ugly. Now I understand the meaning of the crocodile; it is she who is the crocodile."

"If she is a crocodile," replied Ching, "what is it to you?"

The amah slapped his face, and ran into her room.

In the lounge Patrick and Rose sat on the Sheraton settee, which Ching had described as a chair. Patrick stretched his arm along the back of it. Possibly there were no matches handy, for he lit his cigarette at the end of hers,

and, as he looked closely into her friendly laughing eyes, it was obvious that the cheering process had begun. They discussed the theory of re-incarnation and Rose told him of the swift scene which she had visualised on the first evening when they had sat opposite to each other at Jim Rendell's table.

"Egypt," said Patrick, "you and I were both there, and yet . . . after that, I think you were a Roman. I was never a Roman. A Greek, perhaps."

"And Gerald?" mused Rose. "Was he a Roman?"

Patrick did not like that. It jarred him nervously. It seemed a pity to drag in the husband who was so obviously "out of the picture."

"Don't you like Gerald?" asked Rose, in a surprised voice. "He's awfully nice—*really*."

That "really" helped Patrick to rally his forces. "Nice really, although you wouldn't think so," was inferred.

"Yes, he must have been a Roman," he averred, "but he was never in Egypt—with you, and me."

"Ah!" said Rose, "it's picturesque and thrilling, and it helps to make one feel there's some

sort of object in dragging us through it, but, of course, it's in the air ; in fact, Jim Rendell would call it 'hot air,' and, by the way, haven't the psycho-analysts dealt it all a deadly blow ? ”

“ Some of them think they have, but 'wait and see.' They're such materialists. It does seem a pity that the new psychiatry can't be lifted on to another plane, a more *spiritual* plane. They should be Initiate—there should be a priesthood for these surgeons of the soul.”

“ That is what I have been thinking vaguely for so long,” said Rose. “ You express my thoughts for me. We must talk often. I am so glad you're staying here. Do you know I've never met anyone before who could talk to me of these things.”

Patrick looked so ardently at her that she felt rather frightened. The pace was quickening. But, of course, it was quite different from an ordinary “ flirtation.” Their point of interest was the “ soul.”

At that moment the amah came into the lounge. Rose Harbury started, as she often did when this girl came suddenly on the scene. The Malay girl looked at them as she lifted up the tea tray, and for some reason her hands trembled. She

dropped a dish of sweets and they rolled over the floor. Chocolates with frosted violets on the top. Patrick looked at them, and Rose wondered at his expression of dismay. He had not noticed them before. . . . Violets. . . .

CHAPTER IV

THE OWL

UNDER the palm-thatched covering which surrounded the wooden building where the servants were quartered, the pâwang read the future for the Malay girl. She had provided him with a silver tray from the lounge, on which she had poured some of Jim Rendell's blue-black ink. Into this flat, dark, and yet shiny surface the old magician gazed with drug-filmed eyes. He chewed some sort of nut, and by his side was a glass of "whisky-soda," from which now and again he refreshed himself, when he felt his imagination (or his vision) giving out. The amah gazed at the old man as though she would read in his face things perhaps he chose to hide from her.

"Tell me all," she begged.

The pâwang frowned.

"Speak," implored the girl.

"I have spoken," said the wizard, sipping at his glass.

"But there is more," said the girl; "I see by your face there is more. Tell me! I fear no misfortune."

"If you love an infidel," declared the magician, "there will be misfortune, for you and for him."

"Will he love me?"

"He does love you."

The amah sighed. She knew the Englishman did not love her even a little, though he had held her arms so gently for a few seconds behind the curtains outside the lounge. It is true he was an infidel. He would love her yet, she would know when his eyes smiled. . . .

"He will kill you," warned the pâwang, staring at the inky surface on the plate.

"If I die of love," said the amah, "what matter?"

"Death will be unpleasant," declared the pâwang.

"I must die," said the girl, "and it may as well be soon while love is alive . . . to live afterwards. . . ."

"You are foolish," said the old man; "but I have warned you. I can do no more."

The amah took the silver tray and washed the ink away from it preparatory to replacing it.

On her way to the house she passed the Chinese boy, whom to tease was irresistible.

“ ‘ *The owl sighs for the moon,* ’ ” she said.

“ What owl? What moon? ” asked the boy, without raising his eyes from a brass pot he was polishing.

“ I spoke from an old Malay proverb,” she shrugged, deprecating an inferior intelligence. Aware of the scorn in her voice, Ching directed his glance towards the bungalow, which was within sight of the servants’ quarters.

“ That foreign lump lolling on the veranda,” he said, “ is waiting for the female devils of this house to return to it.”

“ Speak not of devils, O infidel,” said the Malay girl solemnly, “ for fear one should rise from the grass and destroy you ! ”

Ching looked apprehensively on the ground, for snakes were very real devils. Then he laughed insolently.

“ That ‘ foreign lump,’ as you call him,” said the amah, with rising temper, “ ‘ *is beautiful as a Malay.* ’ He is no ‘ *pawned spear,* ’ but ‘ *in full daylight he carries a lighted torch.* ’ ”

“ You and your proverbs ! ” sneered Ching.

The young man, “ beautiful as a Malay,” lolling on the veranda, looked out over the

emerald-coloured rain-washed rice-fields, all unconscious that he was the object of discussion. A glorious view stretched before him. Beyond the palms and red-roofed houses near the harbours were the masts of ships, Chinese junks, Malay boats, cargo steamers from India, fishing-boats and yachts with brown, burnt sienna, and yellow sails. The blaze of light and colour was almost painful to the eye ; luxuriant foliage and passionate red blossoms breathed in the quivering heat against a background of purple hills. There should have been inspiration for the poet, but the atmosphere was charged with the languor of the lotus-eater. Never before had Patrick Logan felt the temptation so overwhelming just to "loaf and incite his soul." So far, that was the worst the climate had done for him. Work seemed impossible. The psycho-neurological book was at a standstill, for Dr. Rendell had succumbed to the daily routine—the early morning ride, later a visit by way of a rickshaw to "Nicolson's," which was a sort of restaurant where, as Annabel said, he was soon "lapping up ices, gin tonics, and pineapple cocktails with the best of them." After tiffin the heat became intolerable, and permitted only of a siesta in the fan-cooled quiet of one's own room. Then it was almost time to

dress for dinner. . . . Time! Patrick sighed and tried not to feel that he was wasting his time. In this quarter of the globe the sun smiled mockingly at the values of time.

Patrick did not care to go to Nicolson's; it seemed to him too much like a hot hell filled with babbling elemental creatures, with whom he had one instinct in common, namely to quench a raging thirst. He preferred to stay at home and talk to Lady Harbury about the transcendental powers of the soul. But on this occasion she had gone to Nicolson's. She had left him in the lurch. Perhaps she was tired of talking about the soul.

The morning seemed very long, yet when Ching, the house-boy, brought him a cocktail, he said, "Is it as late as that?" The boy stared at him. "Of course, you don't understand," said Patrick, wondering what sort of personality was hidden behind that impenetrable mask. The boy was, in fact, studying this paragon who had evoked poetry from the amah. The amah was young, she had shiny dark hair, a straight—though rather flat—nose, and glowing eyes. Dressed in a blue sarong embroidered with red and yellow, she might be called beautiful, just as the angry feelings she had evoked in the Chinese boy might be called love. Ching oddly

felt that he would like to put a dagger through any other male creature who dared to look at her. Even of the monkey he was jealous, but the dumb beast he could torment. The Englishman whom she described as "beautiful as a Malay" he would have poisoned, had he dared.

Muttering a few words in his own tongue, the boy slipped out of the room.

Patrick knew that something reptilian had come near him, but—he had other dreams. He lit a cigarette and watched the rings he made. The pernicious habit of drinking cocktails was one he deplored. But he was always hot and often thirsty. There was also a sinking feeling, for which lime juice was inefficacious. The effect of alcohol he knew to be devastating on a being who was psychic, even if he was not spiritual. But supposing he found he was only psychic after all? Well! the journey to the East would be to the good, because it had taught him something. . . .

There was a sound of laughter below. Annabel always laughed a great deal; Lady Harbury laughed a little—sometimes. One of them came up the steps and ran along the veranda. It was Annabel.

She was dressed in canary-coloured ninon, a

short, transparent "rag," revealing still fluffier garments. Round her neck she wore a long necklace of Chinese amber beads, at the end of which depended a crimson tassel. On her head, pulled low down over her eyebrows, was a creation resembling a pier pagoda, "expressed" in cerise Petersham ribbon. Annabel was fascinated by Patrick Logan, her husband's nephew, who was not much younger than she was, and she wanted to see the effect of her clothes on him. Would they rouse him from his air of remoteness?

"What do you think of my hat?" she asked.

He looked whimsically at it. "Isn't it rather heavy and hot?" he queried.

"Of course it's hot and heavy, but didn't it make them sit up and take notice at Nicolson's! You ought to have been there."

"The hat has achieved its object then," said Patrick, "and I'm sure it's charming, although I know nothing about hats."

"You're not very quick with your compliments," said Annabel, "at least not to *me*; but I forgive you. Look what I've brought you." She giggled and held up an egg.

"What rare bird laid it?" he asked. "I don't collect eggs, you know, although I've no doubt this one is worth while."

Annabel threw back her head and laughed with an exuberance that Logan suspected was due to pineapple cocktails.

"It's a crocodile's egg," she declared. "There were seven of them on the shore; their mammas just leave them there to hatch out by themselves. They come out with a wuzz—straight out and bite you."

"If you happen to be near enough," laughed Patrick, edging away from the egg.

"One of them bit through Jim's boot the other day."

"So you want the leather of mine to suffer also," said Patrick

"I'm only joking, but it's rather fun to see them; they're so vicious. Have you heard the big ones snorting in the river? The noise they make when they mean battle—with each other, I mean."

"How interesting—crocodiles, of course."

He fell into a muse, picturing the god Sebek whose creatures at Crokodilopolis the priests fed with wine and flesh and milk and honey—and other things.

"What are you thinking of when you go off queer like that?" asked Annabel.

"Did I go off queer? I was thinking—or

shall I say remembering—the King of Egypt and his crocodiles. If one offended him one was thrown to the crocodiles . . .”

“Don’t tell me,” shrieked Annabel, “I seem to have heard it all before. It’s like a horrible dream. Where did it come from? You have made me feel dreadful.”

Patrick looked reflectively at her.

“I wonder,” he said. “Not Babylon of the hundred gates? A votary of Ishtar . . . Our Lady of the Girdles?”

Annabel stopped her ears. “I won’t listen,” she cried, “you are cruel and most weird. Oh, Patrick, do stop. Say something ordinary.”

He laughed. “I thought that was ordinary.”

“Then what is the matter with me?”

“Pineapple cocktails perhaps.”

“I say, you are rude, aren’t you, Patrick. And yet—somehow, one can’t be angry. You’ve got a way with you.”

Annabel was thinking that she would be able to recount her confidential conversation with Patrick to Lady Harbury. It pleased her to think she also had been initiated into the mysteries of a poet’s mind. Aloud she said:

“You are a flirt, aren’t you?”

“A flirt!” echoed Patrick. “A flirt!”

"Quite an ordinary thing to be, isn't it?" queried Annabel; "nothing to write home about, especially when you're young. I'm not averse to a flirtation myself."

"So I should imagine, but it never occurred to me that I——. In fact, the game doesn't amuse me."

"Well . . . you are . . . " said Annabel. "After sitting in a corner for about two hours with your arm round the back of someone's chair and staring into her eyes as though there were no one else in all the world . . ."

"I thought you were busy dancing."

"I never lose my head," declared Annabel; "can always see about me in my most lurid moments—evidently more than you can do, but I don't blame you."

"Many thanks," returned Logan dryly.

"Don't be snotty," said Annabel cheerily. "I'll have to be off, I've got a party. Raymonde has come back with us."

"Raymonde? Her name does not proclaim her."

"What's that? Oh, she's only just a girl. Father owns tin mines; rolling in the needful. Raymonde, a French name because of her great-aunt or somebody. She had the blight—the

girl I mean—because her young man off'd to Hong Kong and never wrote her a word, but she's better now."

"What about this egg?" asked Logan.

"I'll ring for Ching to take it. So long."

The house-boy, swift and noiseless to the sound of a bell, took away the crocodile's egg, reflecting, as he went, on the promiscuous ways of foreign devils.

Patrick Logan was left reflecting on the ways of his own relations, who were inclined to gossip the beginnings of a friendship into the shallows without giving it any opportunity to get into the fairway. "*Oh, power of life and death in the tongue!*"

Ching, the house-boy, went into the servants' quarters carrying the crocodile's egg. He showed it to the amah.

"Your foreign devil, '*beautiful as a Malay,*' your owl sighs no more for his moon," he informed her.

"How so?" she asked.

"The moon has dropped down from the sky," he grinned.

"Explain! or I will speak of some things to his honour and he will thrash you."

"He will not thrash me," declared Ching, "for I would rather be hanged . . ."

"Cutthroat, explain!"

"They are enclosed in a room together, the two foreign devils, in *his* room. This egg is her love-token. I am to place it in the sun in order that it may be hatched. Doubtless she designs that the small crocodile shall bite his honour her husband, hoping it will perhaps poison his foot. I have heard of such things. These Englishmen die easily."

"Infidel!" said the amah; "liar and pariah dog, I do not believe you."

CHAPTER V

THE SNAKE

CONCEALED by the mangroves which grew in the servants' compound, the pâwang observed the occupants of four rickshaws which came up the drive. Here were Annabel Rendell, Lady Harbury, Dr. Rendell, and one other. Seeing the ruddy locks of this one other, a bright thought came into the wizard's mind. Doubtless his familiar put it there. He waited patiently until the house-boy, Ching, crossed the compound.

"Does your ghost come out into the light of day, young liar, to eat and drink? Is that your floating phantom with flaming serpents in her hair?"

"She looks the same and yet different," replied the Chinese boy, no whit abashed.

"It may well be," reflected the pâwang, as the boy hurried about his business, "that there is something in what he says," and after a few

minutes' cogitation the old man strode out of the Rendell grounds into the white glare of the unshaded road.

The pâwang was evidently immune from sun-stroke, for the glare on the flat road bordered with rice-fields was terrific. Moreover, there was a stretch of two miles between the house of Jim Rendell and the house of John Mallaby, which was his destination. As a matter of fact, the pâwang preferred the sun to the moon. The road he traversed had an evil reputation after dark. On very still evenings one might meet the ghost of a young man with a red throat, riding a bicycle, who had been murdered by two Chinamen. And there was the other and more evil type of spirits; the malicious type, which loved to horrify if it could not actually harm. The ghosts of buffaloes and snakes, too, were alarming. There were also real snakes. But whoever heard of any sort of spirit materialising in the open, under a burning sun? What rite was ever performed in the light of day? The pâwang knew of many unspeakable things that could be done under the moon, especially the full moon. The Lords of the Shadow could be evoked at the time of the full moon. Therefore the moon ruled evil spirits. Although, for his

own purposes, the pâwang had occasionally evoked the dark powers, he was none the less afraid of them. His magic was by way of being a mystery even to himself, but this was not a secret for any other to know. There were some things of which he was comparatively certain, some charms which never failed to work. And there was a power in his own eye by means of which he could persuade—even command. The difficulty was to get people to look him in the eye. They were so afraid it was evil.

Outside the gates of John Mallaby's house the old man waited in the hope of catching sight of one of the gardeners or grooms. It was not long before his patience was rewarded. A small brown man dressed simply in a pair of cotton trousers, and with a handkerchief tied round his head, who was working near the gate, accosted him. He was very polite, for the pâwang was well known, and it was considered unwise to offend him.

"Is John Mallaby away from his home, as usual?" asked the wizard.

"He is in Hong Kong," replied the Malay.

"It is well. Let me enter," commanded the other.

The Malay hesitated. He was between the

devil and the deep sea. If he opened the gates he would assuredly be punished—perhaps with stripes—by the head gardener. If he refused, the pâwang might send his wrath in visible form to torment and terrify. He chose the chance of the stripes.

The old man walked through the gardens to the lawn in front of the house. Then he threw himself on the grass, and squirmed forward with the movements of a snake; meanwhile he chanted a wailing song to the effect that the loved inmates of the house—John Mallaby and his wife—were his father and his mother.

A fat lady emerged from the house, holding up a large yellow umbrella lined with green. The pâwang crawled to her feet.

“What is it you want?” she asked.

The pâwang declared himself; intoning the tale of his virtues, but not his intentions.

“Yes, but what is it?” repeated the lady, irritably. “And do stand up. You want money, I expect.” The pâwang protested that money was of no use to him, that he was an old man, that he lived for the well-being of others.

“Well! But what about it?” demanded the lady. The pâwang stood up.

"Your beautiful daughter is possessed by a devil," he said abruptly.

The lady started. Too well she knew that her daughter had a devil. "It's no one else's business," she said.

"It will bring about much bad business," declared the ancient solemnly, "if the devil is not exorcised."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know? Am I not the p^âwang who entices evil spirits away from plantations? Several hundreds of them followed me down to the river from the new plantation of his honour Rendell. Is it not true that the coolies will not work unless I clear the places?"

"Very likely," replied the lady, "but what's that got to do with me?"

"Your daughter has a devil."

Mrs. Mallaby sighed. She could whole-heartedly agree with the old man that her daughter was possessed by a devil—sometimes. And she was secretly curious about supernatural things, a curiosity which had gathered strength from being repressed by the iron man, her husband. And she suspected that Raymonde's "devil" was a co-ordination of all the little human naughtinesses

which perforce had hidden their heads during the severe training of her childhood. Raymonde had never been to school, and she had had only one governess, Miss Chapman, a lady after John Mallaby's own heart and who was still an inmate of the house. Mrs. Mallaby could sense the disapproving eyes of the ex-governess behind her back, and was thereby stimulated to deal further with the p^hawang.

"Can you do any tricks?" she asked.

"Indoors, in the shade, in a room enclosed," he returned.

"Follow me then," commanded the lady.

Miss Chapman, sewing on the veranda, was emaciated as the lady of the house was other. Both were victims of the climate. "Do you want to see an exhibition of occult powers?" Mrs. Mallaby asked her.

"I do not believe in occult powers," replied the governess, "but—can it be that you are going to sit alone in a room with that ruffianly-looking person? In that case it is my duty to accompany you."

"Don't bother about duty," said Mrs. Mallaby lightly, but the governess rose and followed her into the room. The green reed blind was drawn down to the ground. Green silk curtains hung

across the door and across the archway of the veranda.

"The air is pleasant," remarked the wizard, "it is well that incense should be burned." Mrs. Mallaby produced some scented pastels in a silver bowl. The smoke ascended and permeated the room, which was close—to say the least of it.

"In an atmosphere like this," declared Miss Chapman, "you are likely to faint, and then anything might happen."

The pâwang took no notice of her, but began a series of incantations. Up and down his voice intoned a horrible sing-song. Then he walked, still chanting, round Mrs. Mallaby, who was seated in a large easy chair, making with his finger an imaginary circle. Having enclosed her, he approached the other lady.

"Don't come near me, please," she said with asperity.

"You desire no protection?"

"I have my own methods, thank you. I am not a heathen."

"Then you will take the consequences," said the pâwang solemnly.

The governess sniffed.

The old wizard stooped down and resting on his haunches began a crooning and mysterious song.

Then from some receptacle in his clothing he brought out a tiny antique jar of chased Malay silver. The jar contained some greyish powder, some of which he emptied carefully into the lid which he placed on the floor. When a match was applied to the powder it burned slowly, emitting a strange languorous perfume. Its effect was soporific, and made the eyes of both the women who comprised the old pâwang's audience grow heavy. But the curiosity of each was intrigued by the column of smoke which now ascended from the lid in an oddly material manner. It rounded and curled and coiled ; it coloured, and then—a snake raised itself up, a snake with malevolent eyes and a forked tongue, and strangely with a shining stone on its forehead. The stone emitted rays of red and blue light. The pâwang crooned to the snake, and Mrs. Mallaby leaned forward looking at it with hypnotised eyes. The snake turned and darted, with a hiss, in the direction of the governess. With a half-choked cry she rose and fled precipitately from the room. The pâwang grinned. Mrs. Mallaby gasped. There on the floor was the little silver jar lid, and, in it, the black ashes of some burned-out powder.

" *Was there a snake ?* " asked Mrs. Mallaby. The pâwang pointed to the governess's empty

chair. "I should like some air," said the lady of the house breathing heavily, and she suffered the p  wang to lift the blinds and draw the curtains. She fanned herself. The governess returned.

"I told you not to bother with nonsense about duty," said Mrs. Mallaby acidly.

"The snake did not threaten *you*," protested the governess, and bit her lip, for she had resolved to squash this experiment with the Black Arts by denying the appearance of the reptile. If one out of two declares the thing was not there, the other may safely be called the victim of an hallucination. Besides—she compromised with her bitter conscience—the thing was not *really* there. Whoever heard of a snake with a *bright coloured stone in its head*, save in the archaic chronicles of some old-time traveller?

"How did you do it?" queried Mrs. Mallaby.

The old man placed his hand across his heart. "I am a p  wang," he said proudly; "with my heart's blood I have acquired this power."

"Such nonsense," muttered Miss Chapman.

"And the formula of the powder," he continued, ah! with what difficulty did I acquire it! It will take me long to assemble the contents again."

"Of course," said Mrs. Mallaby, opening a

beaded bag with a gold handle, "I will pay you for your time and for the entertainment you have given us, also for the powder you burnt."

The old man shook his head. "It is priceless," he said mournfully.

"Oh come," protested the lady, "I didn't *ask* you to waste anything priceless. What about five dollars?"

The p^âwang closed his long teeth on a smile. "Five dollars is not amiss," he said, "accompanied by the assurance that I have given pleasure and entertainment." He turned his wicked old eyes in the direction of the governess, who, with her hands clasped and her head slightly on one side, contemplated him with the expression of one who studies an unpleasant object in a museum.

Mrs. Mallaby gave him five dollars.

"Go now," she commanded. He lingered. "The other matter?" he asked.

"Enough, for the present; go."

Mrs. Mallaby turned to the governess. "Emmeline," she addressed her, "that old man says my daughter has a devil."

"He gossips with the servants, Mrs. Mallaby."

"Will you ring the bell, please. I feel faint."

That was Mrs. Mallaby's way of saying she wanted a brandy and soda. At this juncture

there entered a beautiful young girl dressed in white organdie muslin and wearing a string of jade beads. Her golden-red hair encircled her head like the nimbus of a saint. She looked pale and cool and serene. It was Raymonde. She carried a little fawn-coloured animal which resembled a puma with glassy sapphire-blue eyes.

"What animal is that?" demanded the governess.

"Mamma, feeling faint?" asked Raymonde, ignoring the governess. Mrs. Mallaby, leaning back in her chair with nerves relaxed into a pleasant serenity after a stiff peg, smiled genially. "Better now," she murmured.

"What *is* that animal you are carrying, Raymonde?" demanded Miss Chapman, "it looks like a puma."

Raymonde giggled.

"I object to these creatures from the jungle being brought into one's home," continued the governess, "it is unhappy for them and may be unpleasant for us. It will grow up, and how are you to know that its fierce nature will not suddenly assert itself? Already the animal is too large." She looked at it with aversion. Her equilibrium had been shaken already that day

by a snake—an illusory snake—and now—a puma. . . .

Raymonde giggled again and stroked the brown head of the little beast. She took off her jade necklace and twisted it round his neck.

“What fun if he grew into a puma!” she said.

Her mother gave a startled cry.

“Why, I do believe it’s Annabel Rendell’s cat, her Siamese cat,” she said. “Did she give it to you?”

“Oh no, I just took him—while she wasn’t looking.”

“Raymonde, you must give it back.”

“I shall not give him back,” said Raymonde, “why should I?”

“It’s not yours.”

“He is mine because he loves me.”

Miss Chapman looked at the girl much in the same way as she had looked at the p  wang. “I shall consider it my duty to inform Mrs. Rendell of the whereabouts of her cat,” she said severely.

“Shall you?” said Raymonde. “You’ll be sorry if you do.” With that she walked out of the room.

Presently she was heard singing, in a high penetrating soprano, a Malay love song :

*"It is true that I sit on your knee,
But do not hope for further advantage."*

These lines reached the outraged ears of Miss Chapman.

"Horrible," she said.

Mrs. Mallaby smiled uneasily. "She has heard it somewhere, Emmeline."

"You hear what you want to hear," declared the governess; "we have it on good authority that *the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.*"

"The heart of a *man*," corrected the mother of Raymonde, "not the heart of a young girl."

The pâwang returned to the bungalow of Jim Rendell. "Is there any news?" he asked of the amah, who was darning a piece of fine lace.

"Ask the house-boy," she returned without raising her eyes.

The house-boy looked moodily at the Malay girl.

"Speak, young liar," urged the pâwang.

"What is the use, if you think all I say is lies?" retorted the boy.

"I can sift the lies from the truth; speak."

"The foreign devil with flaming hair was present at tiffin," said the boy. "She said only yes and no, but she is much admired, especially

by the Englishman who wears a glass eye when he wants to look. His wife loves, and is loved by, the young man who writes poetry. In the afternoon, while all the others slept, these two sat in the lounge. They moved quickly apart when I brought them tea."

The amah looked sourly at him. "It is natural; all women must love such a beautiful young man," she said.

"Ah! cried the Chinese boy. "I knew it, I knew it."

"You also love him," said the boy.

"*The owl sighs for the moon*," quoted the amah bitterly.

"You love him!" repeated the boy in a surprised voice. Did he expect her to contradict his statement? The amah said nothing, but a little smile quivered at the corner of her mouth, and she looked sideways on the ground as though she visualised a dream. A dream of yesterday, or of to-morrow? Somehow it maddened the Chinese boy. Everything about the amah maddened him, and filled him with cruelty which surged up from some unsuspected depth. He looked down on her sitting there so insolently cool, so unregarding; at the moment dreaming—and unaware of his existence. He went closer to

her and put both hands on her shoulders. She started!

"Dog, remove your hands."

"You call me a dog," he hissed.

"A pariah dog!"

His hands gripped her soft flesh. He dug his nails in with such force that blood flowed from her shoulders, and she screamed, again and again.

The cook, the butler, the groom, and the valet of Jim Rendell rushed to the rescue and dragged the infuriated Ching, now seemingly endowed with the strength of a wild beast, from his prey. The butler, enforced with the moral support of the other servants, administered punishment. The p  wang retreated when Annabel came on the scene to declare that only her husband should do any thrashing.

"She spat upon me," cried Ching, indicating the amah; "she called me a pariah dog."

"Well, so you are," said Annabel.

The amah stood quite still with a strange smile on her face. She wrapped a piece of white muslin round her shoulders. Somehow her attitude annoyed Annabel.

"Why did you provoke him?" asked she.

"Can I help it if he loves me?" simpered the amah.

Her mistress shrugged and went away.

The Chinese boy retired to his room and lay flat on the floor. His eyes rolled back as though by seeing things upside down some new vision was vouchsafed him. It may be that the germ of imagination sprouted within him. Pain had fertilised it. Not the pain of the thrashing, not the pain of jealousy, but the pain of the strange hatred he felt for the amah. He decided to do some harm to somebody. Otherwise he would die of hate, or he would grow cankered with the poison in his blood. He wondered how he could hurt the young man whom the amah had described as "*beautiful as a Malay.*"

CHAPTER VI

WEN T'SI

THE Siamese cat, the priceless creature with sapphire-blue eyes and a long pedigree, Wen T'si, named after the Chinese mandarin from whom Jim Rendell had bought him, was gone. Annabel, to use her own phrase, "cried and cried, and cried."

"For God's sake stop it," implored her husband; "I'll get you another."

"As though you could, when you know they're as rare as rare can be," sobbed Annabel. "Besides, it wouldn't be Wen T'si."

This was unanswerable, and Jim Rendell, impotent to console and unable to bear the sight of tears, strode out into the compound. He was dressed for riding, and he flicked his whip so that the servants shivered. They hurried to and fro, although there was no reason for hurrying. They had all been questioned, there was nothing more

to say, but Jim Rendell remained standing there. And, as if in answer to an unspoken summons, the pâwang turned into the compound. He had no time to run away, so he prostrated himself on the ground.

"My father," he intoned.

"What are you doing here?" queried Jim Rendell.

"I merely called in passing, your honour."

"To ask after my health?"

"There are evil spirits surrounding this bungalow."

"Have they spirited away the Siamese cat, I wonder?"

"It may well be," replied the pâwang.

"It may well be—hot air!" said the planter, "but I shall reward you if by your arts you can bring back the cat."

"The cat has been stolen?" asked the pâwang.

"Obviously; he is not in the grounds, and where could he go? Careering among the rice-fields? Jazzing along the sea-shore? Promenading about the road? Besides, he disappeared within five minutes, while my wife was waving good-bye to a friend."

The pâwang looked wise.

"It may well be," he said reflectively.

"What may well be, you old sinner? You find that cat for me; I daresay you can if you like."

"If I give my time . . ." began the pâwang.

"You will be rewarded."

"Will your honour state the sum?"

"No," said Jim Rendell, "I won't. I begin to think you have stolen the cat yourself in order to obtain the reward. Get! . . . But the reward will be adequate, old devil, if you find him soon," he shouted.

The pâwang salaamed—at a distance.

"Your honour has a kind heart," he said loudly, "but a bitter tongue," he added *sotto voce*.

The man with the kind heart and bitter tongue went leisurely out of the compound, and mounted the horse which was awaiting him with a groom. He rode away to inspect a plantation at some distance. The servants slacked their speed when his back was turned. They were not exactly afraid of him, but he had a presence which inspired respect. He represented the force of character which had made it possible for him, many years before, to clear the jungle forty miles away from even a railway station, with the aid of 300 coolies, and sometimes without a white man to assist him because, for so many of these six

months of hot weather and hard work had proved too great a trial for mind and body. There was malaria, and there were wild beasts—man-eating tigers, elephants with bad tempers, mosquitoes, crocodiles, and snakes to contend with. And there was thirst! Jim Rendell had survived it all, including mutinies among the coolies. His neighbour, John Mallaby, was another man as he, but with Mallaby a hard heart was the complement to *his* bitter tongue.

Inside the bungalow Annabel still “cried and cried and cried.” Finally she grew tired, and went to sleep. Her friends and consolers, exhausted with inventions and counsels of hope, now went their several ways. The neo-platonists, Rose Harbury and Patrick Logan, went into the summer-house in the garden, built after the manner of a Chinese pavilion, with “Temple of the Moon” colours, all cold and grey blue. The walls were painted grey, there were white bronze vases and blue silk cushions, and the blinds were made of blue glass rods strung together with pale cords. The place was enclosing and serene. The atmosphere seemed permeated with the auras of things rather than with the auras of human beings and their disturbing thoughts. The *famille verte* porcelain, and the lacquer inlaid

with glimmering mussel-shell on a black ground, which represented night, reminded one of the art and leisure and labour and taste of a marvellous civilization. Rose Harbury wondered why those who had made the pavilion beautiful so consistently deserted it. She was unaware that the real owner of it had gone over to the other side of the "gulf impassable," but it was not *his* spirit which made her hand tremble when Patrick lighted her cigarette.

"A spirit passed before my face—no, it was a shadow behind me. Surely someone came and looked through the glass blind."

"I didn't see anyone," said Patrick; "was it one of the pâwang's ghosts?"

"A ghost? No, something more material, a servant, perhaps the amah. She takes an unholy interest in my doings."

"They seem to be always watching," said Patrick, "the Chinese boy dogs me with noiseless footsteps, but, when I look round quickly to see if I can surprise him, he is gone."

"They frighten me," said the lady; "I sense something strange and antagonistic about them."

The neo-platonist looked into her brilliant eyes. She was beautiful, and her soul was attuned to his own. "*The body disunites.*" He tried to

recollect the passage about love, which ends with the phrase "*fairer, and more immortal far*"—but his mind grew confused, and only the most ordinary words came to his aid.

"You look adorable when you are frightened," he said. "I have always loved you."

"Always?"

"Through all the ages."

This was reassuring, it was almost impersonal. . . .

The amah stole back to the house, and to her mistress who was now awake, and gave her some tea. She assured her that the p^hawang would find the cat; he was a powerful magician.

"But if Wen T'si should be dead?" moaned her mistress.

The amah refrained from saying the wizard would bring Wen T'si back even from death, but mentioned casually that Lady Harbury and Patrick Logan had been sitting together in the summer-house for many hours. This made Annabel "sit up" as she expressed it. She had never heard of neo-platonism, and she would have laughed it to scorn had she understood less than half of the meaning the word conveyed. With the aid of the amah, she was soon bathed, pow-

dered, scented, clothed and in her right mind, forgetful for the moment of Wen T'si in a righteous desire to prevent the pair in the pavilion from "going too far."

The amah went back to the servants' quarters. "Somehow I will prevent it," she said to herself. Ching, the house-boy, was cleaning the silver.

"Plotter and would-be murderer," sneered the amah, "I have frustrated your design. But what, young infidel, do you suppose would happen even at the hatching of the egg you put in a corner of the veranda of his honour Logan? Is a *man* afraid of a baby crocodile?"

"I was told to put the egg in the sun to hatch its reptile," said the boy sulkily.

"And I have thrown it into the river," declared the amah triumphantly.

Ching looked round to see if anyone was near, for, so great was his love-and-hate for the Malay girl at that moment, that he would have risked strangling her. But the *pâwang* was in sight—*with the cat.*

"I told her you were a great magician," said the amah. "Where did you find the animal?"

"I did not find the animal," declared the wizard with dignity, "I made him come to me. With incantations I persuaded him."

"Will you make someone come to me," asked the girl.

"That depends . . . "

The amah stared at some green jade beads which were strung twice round the neck of Wen T'si. She undid the clasp, and, taking off the necklace, put it in what served as a pocket in her dress.

"Those are the beads of the mad red-haired girl," she said, "whose father, Mallaby, is the richest man in this part of the country."

"Are they *her* beads?" asked the old man in a vexed voice, "I did not know that."

"You do not know everything," said the amah.

"His honour has returned," interposed the butler, who had just come across the compound.

"With alacrity the pâwang bounded towards the front door where Annabel, Lady Harbury and Patrick Logan were grouped together talking to Jim Rendell.

"Well I'm jiggered," said the planter when he saw the cat.

Annabel screamed with joy. "*Where* did you find him?" she asked.

The pâwang gave her the same answer as he had given to the amah.

"But how interesting," said Rose Harbury when this was translated to her.

The wizard, possibly with some sixth sense comprehending her meaning, turned to her and said :

"I can do wonderful things. I made a serpent rise out of smoke in the house of his honour Mallaby ; it hissed at the teacher-woman so that she ran from the room."

"How splendid !" cried Annabel. "You must perform for us. Come to-night after dinner."

"For God's sake, Annabel . . ." began Jim Rendell. . . .

"Do let him," begged Rose.

"If *you* would like it, of course . . . I shall go to bed."

"It is the full moon to-night," said the old man, "all should go well."

"How exciting," cried Annabel. "Oh ! my darling Wen T'si."

When the pâwang went back to the compound he was swollen with importance. "I remain here," he said. "I am raising spirits to-night."

"Not *here* !" said the butler.

"In the house," declared the pâwang.

The Malays sighed with relief. They half believed in and wholly feared the evil spirits with which he dealt. The amah alone was indifferent,

but her mind was preoccupied with other matters. She was concocting a little scheme about the jade necklace, a scheme which was almost as childish as the crocodile's egg design of Ching, but which was nevertheless more likely to give pain and would certainly create misunderstanding between Rose Harbury and Patrick Logan. So she thought. Meanwhile Ching watched her and grew reckless with hate (or love). And, as hate (or love) intensified in his soul, so did his mind become clear with a menace of murder. . . .

CHAPTER VII

THE FULL MOON

THE old pâwang had an audience of five to witness his magic. Rose Harbury, Annabel, the doctor, and Patrick sat within the circle he had drawn round them ; the fifth witness, uninvited, Ching, the house-boy, stood outside the closed curtains, in one of which he had cut a small eye-hole. The room was almost dark save for a candle in the far corner, in front of which Annabel had placed a red silk shield. The pâwang chanted with great effect ; Annabel giggled ; Dr. Rendell was ready to study quite earnestly the superstitious rites of this oriental producer of phenomena and hoped even to gain some copy for the chapter on Hallucinations in his psycho-neurological book. Rose Harbury alone was nervous ; she knew there was *something* in spiritualism and she believed that same something might be dangerous.

Ching the house-boy watched with great interest the snake with the bright stone in its head materialise out of the smoke which curled up to the incantations of the magician. Even when it hissed in his direction he was not afraid, being too intent on trying to find out how the thing was done. Also it suggested a brilliant idea to him. He was disappointed when the short-lived creature dissolved into its original dust again. But, though he had not discovered how it was done, he had discovered a better thing. Turning away from his post of observation in order to cogitate on the inspiration which had sprung up in his dark mind, he bumped against something soft and warm.

"Dog," whispered a well-known voice. It was the amah. Ching seized her arms. She struggled to get away from him and succeeded only in being imprisoned in a tight embrace. The embrace was not affectionate, and for a few moments it was touch and go with the Chinese boy as to whether he should literally squeeze the life out of her, but the other feeling which was so oddly akin to hate triumphed and he kissed her instead, kissed her so violently that she faintly screamed.

"Oh, Annabel, did you hear that?" said Rose Harbury, "do let the light be turned on."

Patrick Logan found the switch and looked

outside the curtain. "There is no one there," he said.

"They were ghosts," declared the p^âwang aggrieved, "it is the full moon ; the place was full of them."

Rose Harbury shuddered.

"Are you really frightened ?" asked Annabel.

"It was only some of the servants ; they are awfully curious."

"I expect I'm afraid of *them*," admitted the lady ; "I hate people to be curious."

"They mean no harm, they are simply children."

"Did you see the snake hiss in the direction of that curtain ?" whispered Rose Harbury to Patrick. "Oh, I feel sure something dreadful will happen."

The young man pressed her hand. "Nerves, beloved lady," he whispered back.

Dr. Rendell overheard the whispered words and thought, "We shall be going back to England very soon."

"And now shall we turn out the light again ?" asked Annabel.

"By all means," said the doctor, "as far as I am concerned ; and ask your mystery-monger to give us something pleasanter than a snake."

Annabel translated this to the p^âwang, who

began a fresh series of incantations. Presently a pale purple cloud floated before them.

"Violet," said Annabel, "what a lovely colour."

Patrick started. Violet! The colour, of course, of imperial purple, the colour of a flower, the flowers of Athens—Alcibiades wore violets in his hair; violets grow on the graves in Flanders—

"Are *you* getting nervous?" asked the lady by his side.

At this moment the noise of a motor-car was heard coming up the drive; presently it reverberated outside the door.

"Who on earth . . . at this time of night?" said Annabel, annoyed.

It was Patrick who now suggested that the light be turned on.

"I guess it'll have to be," said Annabel crossly, "unless, of course, someone wants to see Jim, in which case they can't, for he's in bed."

It was Miss Chapman who was eventually shown into the room. "Is Raymonde here?" she demanded without preamble.

"Raymonde!"

"Her mother and I have come out in the car to look for her," she explained; "Mrs. Mallaby is beside herself. Never at her worst and wildest

has Raymonde behaved like this. Where can she be, alone, at night? The road is dangerous, there are brigands . . . ”

“Has she eloped with someone?” suggested Lady Harbury.

“Does one elope in . . . ” Miss Chapman paused and looked sourly at this handsome lady; “if she is not here, then we must drive into the town without delay, although I think it inconceivable that she should go so far—and for what reason?”

They all followed her out to the car, in which Mrs. Mallaby was seated in evening dress and without a hat. Her eyelids were red, her plump face pale and patchy-looking. She was decorated with emeralds and diamonds.

“Her husband could buy up all the rajahs in the district,” whispered Annabel to Rose Harbury.

“Where can Raymonde be?” wailed Mrs. Mallaby, “where could she go, wearing only pink satin pyjamas?”

Miss Chapman frowned at the lady’s disclosure.

“Let’s telephone all over the place,” said Annabel, and prepared to act on her own suggestion, but Mrs. Mallaby lurching out of the car seized her arm

"No, no," she cried, "if you do that her father will get to hear of it, and that must never be. We shall find her; we *must* find her!"

"Is it her habit to make these—excursions?" asked the doctor.

"Only when . . . that old man," said Mrs. Mallaby, pointing to the pâwang who now emerged from the house, "that old man says she is possessed of an evil spirit."

"Chut!" said the doctor, "you must not listen to these ignorant superstitions."

"It is the full moon," said the pâwang, sensing but not understanding what he heard.

"Raymonde is worse when there is a full moon," declared Mrs. Mallaby, "it seems to make her so restless. She always wanted to run and dance in the garden when the moon was very bright, but her father would never allow it. I always said he was too strict with her. I always told him her temperament would not stand it."

"Ah!" said the doctor, "you suggest to me that she has an *authority complex*."

"I can assure you she has been properly brought up."

"Without doubt."

"She has an alternating personality," said Miss Chapman.

"A fissure caused by repressions," murmured the doctor.

Miss Chapman directed a bitter smile at him. "Not necessarily repressions," she contradicted,—"but we must go. Get into the car, Mrs. Mallaby."

"Meanwhile let *me* go off to the town and look for her," said Patrick Logan, "while you two ladies wait here to see what will happen. You can telephone to your own house, Mrs. Mallaby, she may have returned there."

"Quite a good idea," said Annabel, "you come in and have a drink, Mrs. Mallaby."

The mother of Raymonde consented to this and reluctantly followed by Miss Chapman entered the house. Patrick got into the car.

"Shall I come too?" said Lady Harbury; "a drive in the moonlight allures me, and—I might help you to find this poor girl."

"Do you remember," she whispered, "you told me she was going about hatless in the sun, the first afternoon you and I met?"

"Did I?" said Patrick, "I have forgotten everything but you, in connection with that first afternoon."

She sighed. The chauffeur made the car spin along the road.

"Why do you sigh?"

"I was wondering . . ."

"What?"

"Where Gerald is."

This was a dash of cold water, even in the face of a neo-platonist. Patrick maintained a hurt silence. She was aware of the hurt, but she wanted balm for herself. How should she get it?

"You know," she said, "that my name is Rose?"

"Have I not written a sonnet about Rose?"

"The point is—you having loved me through 'all the ages' and so on"—she laughed lightly—"it should have been a roseate cloud and not a *violet* one the old medium showed us."

Patrick bit his lip.

"Don't you think?" she persisted.

"How horribly penetrating you are. But I never loved *her*—Rosa Mystica."

Raymonde, unaware of, even indifferent to, the troubles of other people, was having vexations of her own about her motor-scooter. She had spun down the white road—such a splendid, uninterrupted stretch of road—with almost the amount of speed which satisfied the restless devil

in her mind, or soul, or solar plexus—whichever is the harbour of these afflictions. It was true, as her governess had averred, that she was always particularly restless at the time of the full moon. Whether it was the light of it, or some compelling influence like that which the strange orb has upon the tides, she was urged by a desire to rush, to swim swiftly in space, to dance in the ether. The feeling she had was indescribable. It was stronger than *she* was, making her feel as though she was encased in a body which cramped and hurt something that longed for expansion. Therefore she jumped from the balcony outside her window (after she was supposed to be in bed) and, garbed only in pink satin pyjamas gathered at the ankles with lace frills, and with slim feet encased in silver tissue slippers, she pushed her motor-scooter through the gate, and started it dangerously along the road.

But near the Rendells' bungalow, something happened to the scooter. It refused to budge. Raymonde had no mechanical genius, and even *she* did not care for the idea of returning on foot along the two miles of lonely road over which she had so quickly come. She dragged the scooter behind a bush and walked round by the mangroves in the Rendells' compound. At first she had

intended to ask a groom, or chauffeur, to settle her machine, then it occurred to her that it would be pleasanter to ask someone else ; the nice man with the monocle for instance, who regarded her with such a friendly glad eye. She knew where his part of the veranda was, and, going round to the lawn, she gave a long low whistle. He was not there ; he was, as a matter of fact, sitting in a sort of stone-covered arcade, the heavy pillars of which supported the balcony above. He was smoking quite contentedly a big cigar, which he preferred to do alone rather than join the séance in the dark. The apparition of Raymonde in her pink pyjamas came into the range of his vision. Her whistle directed to his window gratified his ears. He went down the steps which led on to the lawn.

" I say, old sport," he remonstrated.

" What ho ! " greeted Raymonde. " Will you mend my motor-scooter ? "

" If I can," said Gerald, " but I ain't much of a hand at these kind of sort of things."

" Come on," said Raymonde. He followed her.

" What's the idea ? " he asked.

" Came out for an airing, that's all," she informed him.

" But you know," he said, " one . . . one

doesn't in a way . . . one doesn't *do* these things."

Raymonde stopped and looked up at him reproachfully.

"You too," she said. "Oh, I *am* disappointed." She began to cry. Gerald was distracted. He knew of only one way to console a pretty girl who cried, and that way was taboo in the circumstances. The girl was a mere child, the daughter of a friend of his host. . . .

"What is the matter?"

"Everyone, since ever was," sobbed Raymonde, "*Everyone* has always said you mustn't do these things. I thought you were different."

"So I am," said Gerald. "*I* said, 'one *doesn't* do these things.'"

"What's the difference?"

"Matter of choice," he replied . . . "*does*, different from *must*, don't you know."

Raymonde smiled through her tears. "Matter of camouflage perhaps," she suggested.

"I say, old thing, you're quite clever,"

"No one's ever told me *that* before."

"I daresay I could tell you a lot you've not been told before," said Gerald, "but there again—one doesn't"; he sighed.

"Are you married?" asked Raymonde.

"Don't you know it? Didn't you see my wife the other day? Sort of handsome rather, and a sport."

"I forget," said Raymonde moodily. "There are two of me, you know; one of me only remembers *some* things about the other—not everything."

"'Fraid you're getting beyond me," said Gerald. "What about this motor-scooter, not that I promise anything, mind you."

She led the way to the bush where she had left the motor-scooter, and, behold, it was gone. "This is serious," said Gerald, "I wonder now. . . ." He looked at her uncertainly.

"One of the servants has taken it," said Raymonde; "it's just the sort of thing they would want most awfully. Now what shall I do? I'll have to run all the way. And there *are* brigands, you know—and snakes." She started to run, but Gerald caught hold of her arm.

"No you don't," he said, "not without me anyhow; but come back and have a drink first, and I'll give you one of my linen coats, a long one with a belt, it won't look so bad."

"I don't want a coat," said Raymonde, "and I'm not thirsty"

"Come along," said Gerald, taking hold of her

arm ; " the others are spooking so it's quite all right. "

" I don't care a damn for the others," said Raymonde.

" Don't care was made to care. "

" I've heard that too," declared the girl, who appeared to be soothed by the contact of the friendly arm which was linked with her own.

Thus they walked into the drive, and into a glare of light and a crowd of chattering people.

There was an awful silence.

Mrs. Mallaby stopped weeping and fainted in real earnest. Annabel and Miss Chapman propped her up instead of laying her out flat, but she survived it and presently opened her eyes.

" Oh Raymonde ! " she gasped.

" *Gerald !* " murmured his wife reproachfully.

" What's it all about ? " asked Gerald.

Jim Rendell, red and cross, with top-boots pulled over the trousers of his sleeping suit, said something between his teeth about " the devil ! " . . . Ching, the house-boy, who had been giving an unveracious account about the scooter which he had evidently found, dropped it and fled to the compound.

" I'll thrash *him* anyway," said Jim.

" There's your machine, old sport," said Gerald,

"I told you it would turn up, and I told you," he whispered, "it was better not to do these things."

But Miss Chapman overheard this last remark.

"Which things?" she asked in a hard voice.

Gerald put on his monocle and glared at her.

"I should like to know," began Miss Chapman, but the doctor interrupted her:

"Why not drive home now," he suggested, "everyone is tired, Mrs. Mallaby is ill, Miss Raymonde is—probably rather cold, and—and—all's well that ends well," he concluded lamely.

"If it were ended," whispered Rose. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

ROSA MYSTICA

"If a man is unfaithful, he cannot be surprised if his wife betrays him."

"Another proverb?" Ching sneered.

The amah finished the bowl of rice the house-boy had brought her; then very daintily she took a spoonful of jelly before she replied. Her hair was caught tightly back with two gilded pins, she wore large ear-rings and a blue sarong. As she ate, her teeth showed white against her full lips, which somehow maddened the Chinese youth. His dark eyes filmed with a sultry red colour.

"It is in sugar that you see the dead ant," pronounced the amah.

"Ah! Dead," hissed the boy.

She looked quickly at him. "You brood on death; beware that it does not overtake you."

He laughed derisively.

"I shall watch," she warned him.

"Me?" You watch *him*." A nerve-storm

overwhelmed the Chinese boy and like a panther he sprang at the girl, embraced her and dug his teeth into her chin. But she managed to get a hand free, and taking one of the long pins from her hair she drove it into his arm. With a grunt of pain he relinquished his hold on her, and the girl, calmly wiping the pin with a yellow duster, put it back in her hair again.

"Infidel," she said, "I could have you killed to-morrow by the *kris* of my father or my brother."

"Why do you not do it then?" he asked.

She vouchsafed no reply to this question. Possibly her own secret passion obtained a sort of vicarious fulfilment in the fierce torment of another. Patting her head and smoothing down her sarong, she asked:

"Have they overeaten yet?"

"The English devils?"

"Who else, thickhead? Do *we* make beasts of ourselves, eating and drinking until we are like to burst, and then sleeping it off all the afternoon? Are they drinking coffee and smoking yet?"

"They are," said the boy.

"Then it is time for me to go," said the amah, and she departed in the direction of the house.

As Rose Harbury came out of the dining-room,

the Malay girl slipped from somewhere and salaamed.

"How you startled me," she said. "Annabel, what does she say? I cannot understand."

Annabel was ready, an eager, curious interpreter. "She says you left your necklace in the pavilion this morning," Annabel giggled. "*I wondered* where you were."

Rose Harbury's hand went quickly to the pearls at her neck, where they glimmered on her skin made golden by the sun.

"But I wasn't in the pavilion this morning," she said.

"The amah says that it was while we were having tiffin she found the necklace, and I know Patrick was in the pavilion this morning; he likes to write there."

"Well! I don't follow him about all the time," protested Rose Harbury with a laugh.

"I do believe it's Raymonde's necklace," said Annabel, staring at the jade beads.

"No," said Rose Harbury, "it's mine."

"Then you *were* there after all," said Annabel, and ran into her bedroom laughing as she went.

Rose Harbury had surprised the look of hate in the eyes of the Malay girl that her friend Patrick Logan had failed to find in the eyes of the boy who,

as he said, dogged his footsteps. She felt bewildered and aware of undercurrents which were hostile—also unexplainable. Like many others she regarded servants as "*hewers of wood and drawers of water.*" She was kind and considerate to them, but it never occurred to her that they could possibly be potential for evil in her life. They lived on a different plane ; their interests—she supposed—were confined to their own class. They had their own affairs, their own relations, their own friends and lovers. Why should a Malay girl look at her with murder in her eyes ? Or do I imagine that she does, thought Rose Harbury. Is it merely the savage beauty's way of showing pride ?

She looked at the jade beads. They were without doubt the beads which Raymonde had worn on the day she came to lunch. She held them up to Patrick Logan when he came into the lounge.

" Aren't you coming ? " he asked, ignoring the beads.

" The amah found these in the pavilion this morning ! " she said, but Patrick seemed unaware of the implication in her words.

" She lies ; I was writing there all the morning."

" She thinks they are mine, but they are Raymonde's."

"Well, you know what Raymonde is," said Patrick carelessly.

"Mad, I suppose. I told Annabel the beads were mine. I thought . . . well! I *do* wonder how they came there."

"I can't wonder about anything except . . . " Patrick broke off, for at that moment the house-boy entered and took away a tray . . . "that boy is always inopportune."

"Do you think they are scheming and plotting like the Indians before the Mutiny?" asked the lady.

"No, it's not the same thing here. But let us talk in the pavilion, it's nicer and cooler."

"It is cooler," murmured the lady, "the trees are so thick the sun never touches it, and those blue colours are anodyne to one's nerves. . . . I never had nerves before I came to Prang; yet I would rather stay here this afternoon. Somehow the pavilion presents a sinister aspect to me. I feel that things have happened, or will happen there. I am full of fears."

Patrick looked at her with solicitous eyes. Quite suddenly he forgot his ideals of neoplatonism. "Come away with me—to some place where it is warm but not too hot. . . . The Seychelle Islands. They say you can live there on

very little money. I have *some* money : and I shall make more. I have written a play, which I know will be successful. We should be happy. Let the world be well lost. Your husband would then be free. . . .

“ *Free!*—perhaps he doesn’t want to be free.”

“ I can believe it, but . . . ”

“ I shall not do anything either you or I would be sorry for . . . afterwards.”

“ You are cruel, you first sweep me off my feet and then drop me to the ground. You are too deliberate.”

“ I am older than you ; I am nearly thirty-one, and you are . . . twenty-five ? I am to blame, for I am as incorrigibly romantic as you are, and as you say I am also too deliberate.”

Her coolness inflamed Patrick, and, throwing neo-platonism to the winds, he threw his arms round her instead, and kissed her passionately before she could protest. When at last he released her, she retreated, holding out her pink palms and making a frail barrier between them, a barrier which trembled visibly.

“ Now, I shall *make* you come with me,” cried her lover.

“ No, you would be sorry afterwards. . . . Has it ever succeeded ? We think we are different,

but we are not different, except in a few things that have nothing to do with—well, going to the Seychelles.”

“ You make me dreadfully unhappy.”

“ And I ? Am I happy ? ”

“ Forgive me,” said Patrick contritely ; “ do forgive me. . . .”

The Chinese boy stole away from his place behind the Kelantan curtains, where the eyehole he had made the evening before had served him again. He was thrilled by what he had seen, so thrilled that he still tiptoed even over the compound.

“ Your jade beads,” he said to the Malay girl, “ serve as a bond between these two.”

“ Which two, devil ? ”

“ The young man ‘ beautiful as a Malay ’ and the female fool who might be his mother.”

“ Tell me,” she said.

The boy shrugged. A fiendish smile illuminated, not his face, but his eyes. “ Their words have no meaning for me,” he said, “ but I can show you, if you will stand up.”

The girl looked at him with blazing feverish eyes. She was wondering if this young infidel her father or brother would certainly murder if

they found out that he had dared to make love to her—she was wondering if as an ally he would help her to devise a plan of revenge. But she rejected the idea. His hatred was of the young man, and the amah did not want anything unpleasant to happen to the young man. She only wanted the lady who had captured his affections to suffer humiliation and pain. Not sickness unto death ; the amah was too light-hearted and non-serious to desire anything *deadly*, but — if only she could meet with some accident which would disfigure her face !

“ I must go into the house,” she said, standing up suddenly ; “ it is time to put their dresses out for dinner.”

“ Ha ! ” said Ching, “ now you are as the lady and I am he. So ! ” He flung out his arms in a manner supposed to be imitative of Patrick Logan and kissed her on the lips.

The Malay girl infuriated with jealousy, pain, and real destestation of this hideous proximity, bit the underlip of the Chinese boy until the blood flowed down over his chin and neck.

CHAPTER IX

JADE

"*She will soon hang without a rope,*" said the Malay girl of Lady Harbury, meaning she would soon be deserted by, if not divorced from her husband.

"What reason have you for saying that?" asked the old pâwang to whom she spoke—"but let us talk of the jade necklace."

"Hush! the evil one passes," whispered the amah, but Ching overheard her remark, and for a moment stood balancing a brass tray with obvious intent.

"Infidel," said the old man, "if you hurt a Malay, a dozen *kris* will avenge the deed."

"*One* is enough for him," declared the amah scornfully. "Bring us coffee and cigarettes, boy," she commanded in the manner of her mistress. Ching leaned against the wall, still holding the tray. An unpleasant smile disfigured his mouth.

"Bring them yourself," he retorted.

The pâwang stood up with a hand on the place where his *kris* might have been, or where a dagger was perhaps concealed, but the Chinese boy still smiled. "In the compound of his honour Rendell you would kill one of *his* servants?" he asked. "His honour does not love you, O pâwang; his honour will avenge the dead. An infidel am I? And what of *your* faith? Do your priests approve your black magic?"

The pâwang sat down. Witchcraft was abhorred by the Moslem priesthood and punishable as an offence. "You mock me," he said quietly, "but I know of ways which bring death more slowly and more terribly than a *kris* brings it. I know of ways to make you wish you had never been born. I know of ways to make you die daily; all your hair and your teeth shall fall out. . ."

"He is frightened!" shrieked the amah triumphantly.

"I am not frightened," said Ching, "but I should like to know of these ways. Teach me one of them. I will even pay to learn it. He produced from his pocket a silver cigarette-case which he offered to the wizard, but the amah snatched it out of his hand.

"Thief," she cried; "this belongs to . . ."

"*The young man 'beautiful as a Malay',*" sneered Ching.

"My children," said the pâwang, "do not quarrel, and let me see the cigarette case. Is it silver?"

But the amah put the cigarette case in the bosom of her jacket. "*I will return it to him,*" she said softly; "*I will go into his room and tell him I found it.*"

"And *where* shall you tell him you found it?" asked the Chinese boy.

"Where did *you* find it, young infidel?"

"That I will not say," returned Ching; "guess where I found it, Malay girl! Guess! And will *he* love you for finding it—for spying on his secrets?"

If blazing eyes could have burned the house-boy to a cinder, the amah's eyes at that moment were capable of doing it; nevertheless Ching found her particularly striking when she was in a passion. The amah wore heavy gold ear-rings, and she dusted her face with the *bassanée* powder used by her mistress. These allurements, added to her rage, stung the Chinese boy to further insult.

"You stole the jade necklace," he accused. "You are a thief, and I will tell his honour Rendell. Enquiries have been made for the beads

only to-day. They are of jade, so beautiful a green as should never have been allowed to come out of Hong Kong, where the foreign devil Mallaby bought them."

Both the amah and the old man stared at the boy. He had overheard the pâwang's remark about the jade necklace—so they supposed—before he entered with the tray. The manner of each one altered.

"But I gave the necklace to Lady Harbury," said the amah; "she said it was hers, though we all know it is not hers."

This was news to Ching.

"Oh, that I had removed it from the neck of that cat!" groaned the pâwang. "I—thinking that the beads would bring me a reward for my honesty—Alas!" he smote his breast—"where has the Lady Harbury hidden them?"

"She has not hidden the necklace" said Ching, "for I have hidden it."

"You have hidden it!" the girl and the old man both ejaculated together. "Where?"

"I shall not tell you," said Ching insolently.

The amah shrugged. The necklace no longer interested her. It had failed in the mischief she had devised and it was too notable a thing to steal. A string of perfect jade beads of the

rarest and most translucent green! She could not wear them herself and they were not worth the punishment that would certainly be hers if she were discovered pawning or selling them. Moreover she preferred turquoise to jade. As for the old pāwang his interest in the necklace puzzled her. He wanted it. Why? Not to wear. Nor to give—at his age. To sell? Again why? His needs were few. He fed well every day on the daintiest of the confections prepared by Jim Rendell's Chinese cook. He slept in the compound often, and there were other houses which had equally spacious servants' quarters. She was about to question him when she realised that a shadow darkened the doorway. It was the shadow of the master of the house.

"Where is the pāwang?" he demanded.

The amah looked round quickly. "Was he here?"

"You're damned clever. 'Was he here' indeed," said Jim Rendell. "Quite a good actress." He pinched her ear and she looked languishingly up at him. She was not in love with him; he was not "beautiful as a Malay" but he was a *man*, a man born to command.

"Your honour flatters me," she simpered; "how could the aged one be here, and yet not here?"

"There are windows," said Jim Rendell, nodding to one that faced him, "and he's in league with the devil. Moreover I saw the house-boy skidaddle like a short-circuit flash. . . . What about that jade necklace?"

"The Lady Harbury's necklace?" asked the amah sweetly. Jim Rendell glowered at her. He had not a subtle mind. He was simple, direct and forceful. If the girl Mallaby had lost her jade beads in his house, the beads must be found again. But he was reminded by the amah of that which Annabel had told him, namely, that Lady Harbury had declared the beads were hers. Obviously he couldn't discuss it with the amah. That was Annabel's job. So, abruptly and without another word, he turned his back on the Malay girl and went down the wooden steps which led into the compound.

Within a few minutes, the pâwang was back in the covered passage of the palm-thatched wooden huts dedicated for the use of the servants. Ching, the house-boy, followed in his wake.

"What did the red-faced foreign devil do to your ear?" he asked the girl. The amah smiled, retrospection in her eyes.

"Did he accuse you of stealing the necklace?" asked the pâwang.

"Accuse *me*?" said the girl angrily. "I am no thief and his honour knows it." She pointed across the compound in the direction in which her master had gone.

"There goes a Man. You will do well to fear him. He knows how to deal with thieves, infidels and pariah dogs. Even a tiger he has faced alone in the long grass. I know, because my brother was with him at the time. Alas, that my brother and three others of his kind ran away and climbed hastily a tree. But the master he stood still with his hand on his little gun. He looked at the tiger, and the tiger looked at him. It was a young tiger. And the young tiger turned and slunk away in the long grass. The young tiger feared a *Man*."

"Ha! cried the Chinese boy, "you love his honour *too*."

The amah slapped the boy's face. There were rings on her fingers and the slap scratched as well as stung.

"My children, do not quarrel," implored the p^âwang; "rather let us consult about the jade necklace."

"She has hurt me," groaned Ching. "Why should I be so constantly hurt?"

"What is there to say about the necklace?"

asked the amah, "except that this boy here has stolen it?"

"I said I had *hidden* it," corrected Ching.

"Tell me where, or I will send a spirit to torment you," threatened the wizard.

"I am not afraid of spirits," declared the boy; "my venerable ancestors are spirits, they will protect me."

"Not against such a devil of the mountains as I will send," threatened the wizard.

The boy shrugged.

"*Why* do you want the necklace, pâwang?" asked the amah.

"Did I say I wanted it?"

At that moment an electric bell rang. The amah, recognising it as a summons, departed. Half-way down the steps, when she was out of sight of the old man, she turned, and, putting her finger on her lips, she beckoned to the Chinese boy. He followed her, and joined her on the other side of the compound.

"Boy," whispered the amah, "find out from the old pâwang why he wants the jade necklace."

"Why should I find out?" demanded Ching sulkily, "you have slapped my face; it still hurts."

" Ah ! Ah ! " soothed the girl, " I will slap it tenderly next time. I will be kind."

" How kind ? "

She pinched his arm. Inflamed by this, the boy seized her waist and gave it a sort of ju-jitsu twist so that she screamed, attracting the attention of Jim Rendell who came round from the front of the house.

" What devilry is this ? " he demanded.

" Your honour," faltered the girl, " it is a game."

" Funny sort of a game," said Jim Rendell. " Why, you've got tears in your eyes, girl ; shall I thrash this young ruffian ? "

" No, no, your honour," protested the amah, " he loves me."

" She slapped my face," protested Ching.

" Oh ! It's that sort of game," said Jim Rendell. " Well, well ! We've all got our own ideas of love. . . ."

The Chinese boy went back to the p^hawang, who was sitting as he had left him smoking cigarettes, taking one after the other out of an enamelled box which had once adorned a cabinet in the lounge.

" Boy," said the old man, " where is the necklace you stole ? "

Ching hesitated. "I will tell you, O venerable pâwang—presently ; but I did not steal it."

"You do well to speak with politeness," said the old man. "What is your motive ?"

"I desire to learn," said Ching. "I sit at your feet ; I wish to become instructed in the ways of magic."

"Why ?"

"I wish to know how to commit murder without being found out," replied Ching frankly.

"By the time you have learned that—by means of magic—you will have lost your taste for murder."

Ching's face fell. "But I will pay," he said, "I will give you the jade necklace."

"You will do that ?"

"After . . . not before . . . I learn something."

The pâwang considered. He looked at the Chinese boy as though he would read his soul. Perhaps he was able to do so. Then he said :

"I will tell you to-morrow. It may be that I shall be permitted to show you one of the lesser mysteries . . . in return for that necklace of jade. But you must sign your name on a slip of bamboo cane to the effect that you will keep your promise. You must also give me three jade beads from the necklace, in order that I may know you have

hidden it and that I may show them to the planter Rendell (thus proving that you stole them), should you not keep your promise."

"Very well," agreed Ching.

"And about the other matter—Who is it you would murder?"

"The young man Logan."

"I advise you to be careful. The trouble they make over the death—in such wise—of an Englishman is unbelievable. Look you! What a noise over the affair of the young man on the bicycle who was carrying money. . . ."

"How did they kill him?"

"Two Chinese brigands cut his throat; they were both hanged in Singapore. It is foolish to commit murder."

"In such a manner as throat-cutting certainly."

"I warn you," said the pâwang, "that it will be foolish for you to commit murder in any manner."

"Have you found out why he wants the necklace?" the amah asked the Chinese boy later.

"I forgot to ask him," said Ching, "but I shall know to-morrow night. . . ."

"To-morrow night?"

"You are curious, Malay girl, would you follow me to Panjang Street?"

" *I follow you !* " cried the amah, " and where is Panjang Street ? "

" Does not your father's third wife live there ? "

" I do not know my father's third wife," said the amah almost choking with rage, " I have not spoken to my father since he divorced my mother."

" Aha ! Malay girl, what of the *kris* of your father and your brother; did you not boast that you would have me killed by the *kris* of your father and your brother ? "

" They will kill you," said the girl, but she was at a loss, so she turned on her heel and left her tormentor. The boy shouted after her, " You lie about Panjang Street and about your father, for *I* followed *you* to Panjang Street ! "

The girl never turned her head, and Ching was left with his own thoughts. His mind recurred to the magic of the *pâwang* which he had seen through the eyehole in the curtain. A snake that hissed and darted with a forked tongue. . . .

CHAPTER X

VIN ORDINAIRE

JIM RENDELL was asking his wife much the same question as the amah had asked of the Chinese boy. Only he did not ask why the p^hwang wanted the jade necklace, being unaware that the old man had any interest in it. But he was puzzled that the old man should be so anxious to collect dollars ; for, as Jim knew, the old ruffian had made enough money in a few weeks to last him a year—even more than a year. The needs of the Malay are simple ; a sarong, a little rice, and a palm-thatched hut to protect him from the sun, the rain, the monsoons and occasional tornadoes that sweep the coast. Moreover “the old devil-raiser sleeps in anybody’s compound,” opined Jim ; “in mine, as likely as not.”

“Well, it doesn’t hurt *us*,” said Annabel.

“But what’s it all about, all this spooking and mystery-mongering ? ”

"Already my head aches as the result of so many mysteries," complained his wife. Don't make it worse."

"I want to unravel the mysteries," said Jim. "I won't have things of this sort going on either in my house, or in my compound. Even your amah and the house-boy are making love in their own peculiar manner——"

"Are they?" giggled Annabel. "How lovely!"

"It's not at all lovely, I assure you," said Jim, "and your levity shows an inability to grasp the situation. You regard these servants as 'hewers of wood and drawers of water.' They are; and for that reason they need an iron rule. Threats and thrashings are the only things I have found to be efficacious. Let them see you are master—or mistress," he added.

"We got on all right before," grumbled Annabel, "why should we bother now?"

Jim Rendell shrugged. He was too tired to argue further. After a whole day spent in "walking" a plantation he wanted peace, and a few cooling drinks. Then dinner, then bed. Instead of that, it had been "one damned thing after another," ever since the mysterious departure, and return, of Wen T'si. How did the cat go? How did the cat return? Through the

magic of the pâwang ? Not likely. And he had been particularly annoyed by the silly séance with the old pâwang as demonstrator of psychic phenomena. In his house too ! If there had been no séance, Gerald Harbury would not have been sitting alone, exposed to the temptation of making love to a fly-away young female who chose to perpetrate a moonlight raid on his house attired in pink pyjamas. For it never occurred to Jim Rendell that Gerald had *not* made love to the girl. Then there was Lady Harbury, stately and superior, and " not this year's bird " by any means, actually carrying on a kind of flirtation with Patrick Logan, the sort of " flirtation " Jim Rendell found himself unable to understand. His ideas were definite about such matters. There was a dividing line, and you stood on one side or the other—people who hovered on the brink seemed to him to be lacking in common sense. He had no use for them, as he phrased it. However, thank God, none of it would last very much longer, for Gerald Harbury had obtained a post in Kong Hong, through his agency. Lady Harbury did not look overjoyed at the prospect of Hong Kong, Jim reflected. And his brother, and Patrick ? They spoke of returning to England, the doctor having suggested a sojourn in

Egypt on the way, but Patrick now sprang a sudden affection for China. Hong Kong, shall we say? said Jim to himself.

"I shall be dull when they are gone," observed Annabel, as though in answer to his thoughts; "can't we *all* go to Hong Kong?"

"I'll take you a trip to Japan, darling, instead," promised her husband.

Annabel made no reply to this. What was the use? She would see to it that she didn't go to Japan. She had no friends there, and she knew that a trip to Hong Kong would be more exciting. There were lots of men there. She had heard that, in the famous bar, they stood in rows, ten deep, every day. Where men congregated there was always fun and excitement. They made life jazz as it were. . . .

"There's this affair about the jade necklace," said Jim irritably, unable to settle to rest either his mind or his body. "I can't understand it. I could have staked my life on Lady Harbury. Raymonde thinks she dropped it here."

"Raymonde doesn't care," said Annabel. "It's not as though she made a *fuss* about the necklace."

"That's not the point. She's lost it, and Lady Harbury seems to have grabbed it,"

"Rose Harbury didn't *grab* it," said Annabel ; "she merely said very nonchalantly 'that's mine' when the amah brought it to her. Perhaps she *did* drop her jade beads in the pavilion ; perhaps she thought they were hers."

"Well, she must have found out by now that they aren't," said Jim, "so where has she mislaid them ? Why not ask her ? "

"Oh, Jim, how can I ? " protested Annabel, "when I heard her tell the amah the necklace was hers. It would be insulting."

"I wonder if the old devil-raiser's got anything to do with it," said Jim. Funny affair about Wen T'si."

"He's a dear old thing," said Annabel, "I won't hear anything against him."

"Gosh ! " ejaculated Jim. " You—you're too tolerant of that old ruffian."

"Have another drink," suggested his wife.

"He mixed a *stengah*, long and strong.

"Where is everybody ? " he asked.

"The servants ? "

"You know very well I don't mean the servants," snapped her husband.

"Shall I go round and see if everyone's all right" asked Annabel sarcastically. "Wen T'si, my love," she addressed the Siamese cat

whom she was nursing, "come with Missus and see if everyone in right room dressing for dinner. Little Wenky Tsity like to come?"

"You sicken me," said Jim. "The way you talk to that brute. . . . Get out of the room, both of you."

"Come along, Wen Tsi," sang Annabel, "let us both 'get' from this nasty man, whose bark is worse than his bite, who has a 'kind heart,' but *such* a bitter tongue."

Annabel went into her own room in order to garb herself in the fragile creation of silk ninon which was dignified by the name of a dinner-dress, but which looked more like a number of butterflies' wings strung together on a velvet band. Gazing at her pretty face in the glass, she wondered how it felt to be desperately in love. Annabel had never been, would never be, *could* never be desperately in love. But she knew someone whom she suspected of being in that puzzling condition. It amused her, and filled her with curiosity. She wanted to see how a dignified woman of the world would deal with such a situation. Would she presently behave in some frantic or silly manner? Surely, reflected Annabel, she would *not* go about all the time, to the last, with a face as composed as a Buddhist saint.

As for Patrick Logan, he couldn't really care *much*, so reasoned Annabel, or he would scarcely be so quiet and cold. . . . Annabel's own admirers declared themselves in terms of what she supposed to be real passion, whenever they found such opportunity. They got very red in the face, they trembled, they became breathless when they told her that unless she responded to their desperate love they would be driven to act desperately. Yet—no one of them had ever committed hari-kari. Were men for the most part insincere? In any case no one of them had ever got *her* to make a fool of herself. She had listened and laughed, she would continue to listen and laugh. As for the Harbury—why couldn't she be less serious, instead of solemnly courting a situation? After all, a husband has *some* rights. Annabel remembered hearing Jim say that Gerald Harbury was rather handy with a gun. . . .

In his own room Gerald was trying to feel oblivious of the fact that someone outside was trying to attract his attention. He felt horribly nervous. Supposing . . . a bit of fun was all very well, but real trouble was a nuisance. He hated trouble. Also he hated double-dealing—never mind how attractive the double-dealer

might be. If you shut your eyes to the things you do not wish to see, he argued, they cease to exist. But do they? Even as he thought this, a fruit resembling a custard-apple came full tilt through the window and plopped on the floor.

"Some shy," he said, and laughed in spite of himself, "but I say, old thing, I wish you wouldn't sort of keep on hopping around like this; you'll get me into awful trouble."

"Who with?" asked Raymonde, whose face now appeared on a level with the floor of the veranda, "and do lift me up," she said; "if you don't pull me through, I'll fall and break my neck, and then there *will* be trouble."

"Little devil," said Gerald, but he did as he was requested to do. "And what now?" he asked.

"We can have a chat," said Raymonde complacently, "give me a drink and a cigarette."

"I'll give you a cigarette," said Gerald.

"Why not a drink? The first afternoon we met you offered me one; you began it."

"Began what?" said Gerald desperately. "I didn't begin anything. How was I to know who you were that afternoon? I called out to you; it was only a joke."

"So is this a joke?"

He grimaced and looked round his room. "I told you before, one doesn't do these things," said Gerald severely; "other people, don't you know, might not appreciate the joke. They might sort of, kind of . . . well . . ."

"What?"

"They might tell my wife," he concluded lamely.

"Blow your wife," said Raymonde.

"Nothing of the sort, besides she'll hear you," he said, "and kindly remember, young lady, that she *is* my wife and so . . ."

"Can't you finish a sentence?" asked Raymonde.

"No, I ain't got enough brain," said Gerald sulkily.

"You think she's so perfect," said Raymonde bitterly, "but I saw her kissing the poetry merchant the other day."

"Little liar!"

"Am I? I saw her; it was in the lounge, and I slipped out instead of going in. She had my necklace in her hand, and now . . . where *is* my necklace?"

"Good God!" said Gerald, "do you accuse my wife. . . ."

"No, no, don't look like that," begged Ray-

monde in a frightened voice. "I've only told you for a joke. I didn't know you would take it so seriously. I thought . . . I thought . . ." she began to cry.

"A joke again?" said Gerald, looking gloomily at her. She was so childish in her white muslin frock, with a blue sash and turquoise beads to match it . . . and her wild aureole of red-gold hair. He put his hand on her head—consolingly. The result of this action was that she flung her arms round his neck. What could he do? What *does* one do in such circumstances?

"My dear," he said, "poor baby, what *is* the matter with you? Please don't cry."

"I want to be loved a little, that's all," sobbed Raymonde. "Nobody ever *loves* me. Father wouldn't let mother for so long that now she doesn't even want to. He said it was demoralising to demonstrate affection. I used to listen at doors when I was young and heard all about it. I wanted to find out the reason why I must never do this, and that, and the other. Then there's Miss Chapman. . . . Heavens!—I wanted love, and I got Miss Chapman——"

"There, there," he soothed, "and don't use so much language. Where did you pick it up?"

"At Nicolson's," said Raymonde, "I was never allowed to talk, so I just listened, and don't tell me it's not done, everybody does it. Harry did."

"Harry! Who's he?"

"Ah! You're dead jealous," said Raymonde in a satisfied tone. "I was engaged to Harry, and—Oh! I suppose he didn't care for me either, for he went to Hong Kong and I haven't heard from him—not once, ever since; not that it's broken, it's only hanging on as father says No one loves me," and she began to weep afresh.

"Nonsense," said Gerald recklessly, "*I* love you."

"Do you really?" said Raymonde, smiling through her tears. "I'm so glad; you're just the sort of man I like, not a milksop like Patrick Logan, nor a brutal devil like my father."

"I say, you know," began Gerald, disengaging her hands from his neck, "It won't do, really now; there's Harry, you know. . . ." A wave of sense and sanity rushed over him. Only—a very pretty girl having thrown her arms round his neck weeping and asking to be loved, the merest politeness demanded a sort of kind of response. That was all. Happily at that moment the noise of a car sounded outside.

"Dashed if they haven't come after me again," said Raymonde.

"Now you've done it," said Gerald, sitting down on his bed.

"Pooh," said Raymonde, and walked coolly out through the door.

"Just called for a moment, but find I'm a bit late," she informed Jim Rendell whom she met in the porch where he was interviewing Miss Chapman. "Cheerio!"

"So she was here after all," said Jim Rendell as he watched the retreating car. "I wonder!"

Meanwhile Gerald brushed his already polished hair, and, having reviewed himself in the mirror and decided that he had made the best of himself, which was not saying much, he sighed, let up the green blind which divided his part of the veranda from his wife's, and rather shyly stood blinking with his back to the light.

"Come in, Gerald," she said in a soft voice.

He stole a quick glance at her and saw that her eyes were red.

"You heard?" he asked.

"I tried not to hear—but thank you for being so sweet about me, Gerald."

He reflected with some satisfaction that she had heard and not seen. "Of course I shouldn't

allow anyone to say anything about you," he said.

"Thank you," she murmured, "dear thing."

Gerald stood frowning and rather nervously swinging his monocle. "God knows," he said, "I didn't want that girl to . . . well, you know, one doesn't sort of kind of give her away as it were . . . and I did say 'Hallo, Ginger!' once . . . seems to have boosted her up with no end of encouragement."

"Don't tell me any more," begged his wife, "or I shall have to . . ." she paused, and he glanced swiftly at her. Then he turned and looked out of the window. In the evening sky the planet Venus shone like a miniature golden moon.

"That's how I've always thought of you," he said, looking at the star.

Lady Harbury burst into tears. Her husband had never seen her cry before. He could comfort a silly flapper when she wept, but he could not comfort the lady whom he had compared to a star. He stopped swinging his monocle, and, folding his arms, stared at her in dogged distress.

"Rose, what is the matter?"

"Isn't it rather a trying climate?" she countered, drying her eyes and faintly smiling.

"Ah! Now you look more like yourself."

"But not like a star; for heaven's sake, Gerald, don't compare me to a star. Doesn't your imagination quail before such splendid isolation?"

"I ain't got any imagination," said her husband, "I'm only ordinary, and you know it. *Vin ordinaire*."

"Like that golden wine they used to give us at the Villa del Puzzeni, near Torino. Just wine fresh from their own wine-press in beautiful cut-glass decanters. . . ."

"Deadly dull; got awful tired of it."

"I didn't," said the lady, "I couldn't drink Pol Roger every day."

"Does that mean," began her husband taking a few steps towards her, but she held out the pink palms of her hands as she held them out when Patrick Logan had put his arms about her. He frowned and spoiled the situation by asking:

"What's the matter now?"

"Nothing, only I feel hot, and faint, and horrible."

"You don't look any of those things," replied Gerald, gazing intently at her.

"How can you say so? And my eyes are red too . . . when are we going to Hong Kong?"

"To-morrow, if you like."

She laughed. "You are literal; at least, you know I can't get ready by to-morrow, or even by next week. Besides it would be rude. After all, we have had a pleasant time here."

"Bit fed up, myself."

"There's the big-game shoot."

"Yes."

Rose Harbury began to feel nervous. "Isn't it time?" she suggested; "almost dinner-time."

He looked at his wrist-watch. "I'll leave you," he said shortly. "So long!"

Gerald went out by the way he had come. His wife sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands. He had compared her to a star and he had asked her no questions. He trusted her. And he had called himself *vin ordinaire*, but surely it was *vin ordinaire* in a beautifully cut glass, clean and clear and polished and finely shaped. . . .

In his own room, Gerald opened one of the drawers in a lacquer bureau. He took out a revolver and handled it thoughtfully. Then, with a grim smile, he put it back in the drawer. Presently he went into the lounge polishing his monocle and humming a French song.

CHAPTER XI

THE SORCERER

IN a small crank fishing-boat, the old pâwang and the Chinese boy journeyed up the river. Their destination was known only to the wizard. A waning moon, low on the horizon, shed a silver pathway across the sea, but her light was hidden from the stream by the trees and shrubs which lined the banks. The air buzzed with varying sounds, with the sounds of the many creatures that sting, with the chattering of monkeys, with the trampling of heavier beasts, elephants and others. And in the water there were dark shadows.

"Crocodiles! They eat dogs, and even the chains with which they are tethered," shuddered the house-boy.

"And they bury men in the mud-banks until they are rotted and therefore tender and tasty,"

mocked the pâwang. " Boy, are you afraid of a crocodile? And *you* would learn the ways of magic!" He laughed a cackling laugh: " the magician must pass through worse ordeals than this ere he be initiated."

The Chinese boy was now afraid of the old wizard, who seemed to be in his element in these dark places, and he was glad when the boat was tethered to the stump of a tree. " Have we far to go?" he asked.

The pâwang gibed at him. " Return, if you are afraid," he commanded.

But the Chinese boy preferred to meet devils in company.

They walked a very short distance and quite suddenly they came upon a clearing in the shrubs, whereon was built a palm-thatched wooden hut raised well above the ground. A short ladder consisting of about six steps led up to the front doorway. Inside, a red glow was diffused by an oil lamp with a Chinese shade. The air was heavy with incense and with the smoke of something unpleasant. A brass bowl containing liquid of a suspicious red colour, stood on the floor. There was a closed round basket, such as Ching had seen the Indian jugglers use in their tricks performed in the market place at Prang. A

voice came from the far corner of the room,
“Is this the infidel?”

Ching looked in the direction of the voice, and defined the face of a very black man wearing a red turban and a red sarong. An Indian? It was too dark to be sure. The pâwang addressed him as Master. The old man laid a few dollars at his feet.

“The ointment was efficacious,” he declared; “she will have another jar.”

“Not unless she pays twice as much for it,” rasped the sorcerer.

It dawned on Ching why the pâwang was always wanting money; he served another higher in his profession than he was. It is a simple enough matter to poison an enemy with the juice of the upas tree, but the unguents of black magic are more complicated. Philtres, and oils—of which the mere odour was fatal—adorned a shelf laden with sealed white jars. There was a glass bowl filled with asps and toads, which were fed daily on poisonous fungi, and tortured until presently they would die in agony and spite. The ashes of these made the nucleus of a deadly powder. . . .

“What is it you want?” asked the sorcerer.

The Chinese boy pointed to the shelf. “The

deadliest of these," he said ; " one which will cause pain as well as kill."

" For an Englishman," interposed the p  wang.

" That will never do," said the sorcerer. " It is too dangerous to kill Englishmen. Not even for a string of Chinese jade beads will I help you to do it."

" But for this ? " asked the Chinese boy. He held in his hand a lady's gold cigarette case, in the corner of which the letter A was set in diamonds. It was beautifully polished gold, the diamonds glittered. The p  wang's eyes widened.

" Gold ! " he exclaimed ; " but this is worth while, this is better than the silver one you stole."

" I did not steal it," said Ching, " I found it."

" One word serves as well as another," said the master. " Give me the gold bauble, and take this in exchange for it." He handed the boy a small wooden tea-box, the lid of which was sealed.

" But what is it ? " asked Ching.

" You will find out when you open the lid of the box, which you must do within a week from now, and at the moment when you desire your revenge."

The boy looked sulky.

"We could kill you easily," said the master.

"Mahmud!" he called.

A tall Malay appeared from behind a dark curtain.

"Young fresh blood, newly shed," said the sorcerer, looking into the bowl, "is useful for certain incantations. He stared meaningly at the Chinese boy. The Malay servant stood motionless.

"Well!"

"I am satisfied," said Ching.

"Now you may go," declared the sorcerer.

"Alone?"

"I have another boat for my friend here. You must go alone."

"But is there to be no magic?"

"Not for you. Your magic is in that box. Go!"

The tone was one of command, and reluctantly the Chinese boy set out on his solitary return journey. As he went he heard a sonorous incantation rising from the hut among the shrubs and trees. The Sanscrit words were unintelligible to him.

When he reached the compound he was able to slip the wooden box which had been given to

him by the sorcerer under the bed in his room. The amah awaited him outside. He regarded her with an air of superiority. *She* had promised to be kind! He would show her.

"Did you find out anything?" she asked.

"It is unwise to impart knowledge," declared the Chinese boy.

"You promised."

"A promise made to a woman does not count."

"When it is made by a Man," said the amah tauntingly. She began to hum; then presently she broke forth into song, a love song. It was amorous to a degree, cooled at the beginnings of each stanza by references to coco-nut groves and camphor trees. The Chinese boy was inflamed, as she intended he should be. Visions of subtle cruelties floated before his inner vision. He knew of tortures. . . . Suddenly she stopped singing.

"Have you stolen a gold cigarette case?" she asked.

"I have not, why should I steal it?"

"For the same reason that you stole the silver one."

"Which I *found*."

"So be it. Happily they do not suspect us."

"Why?"

"We never stole things before, never before all these people came to stay here."

"I do not understand you."

"You have no understanding," said the amah, "therefore how can I inform you?"

"Whom do they suspect of stealing the cigarette case?"

"The Lady Harbury."

"But it was I," began Ching unwarily.

"Ah! you confess."

The boy looked as though he would spring at her.

"I shall not tell," said the girl, "if you will show me how the pâwang caused a snake to grow out of a little box of black powder."

"What box of black powder?" asked Ching sullenly.

"Did we not both look through the curtain?" coaxed the amah.

The boy stared at her with expressionless eyes. Then a gleam came into them.

"Which curtain?" he asked.

The amah slapped his face. The slap smarted, and the boy groaned. But it was not the sting

of the Malay girl's hand which evoked the sound of pain. He was realising that he had been cheated out of that which he had paid for in gold. He asked for a magic snake—well, he had not *asked*, but it was understood by the *pâwang* who had evoked the snake. They had given him a real snake. He knew it. There was no magic in a real snake.

But it had a forked tongue . . .

And poisonous fangs. . . .

The amah began to hum again. Once more she broke into song.

“O feathery branch of the bamboo tree,
Hiding the light of the moon from me ;
So in the shade where none shall see
Even as one we two shall be.”

The amah composed these songs as she sang them. Some of them would have made even a psycho-analyst blush. The Chinese boy listened, and *hated* and loved. Devices and tortures floated through his mind. If he embraced the Malay girl she would probably scratch his face or do him some grievous hurt. But he remembered how Jim Rendell had pinched her ear. She wore heavy ear-rings. Quick as a wild animal, he gave one of the ear-rings a tremendous tearing pull. Then, like a creature of the jungle, he was out in

the compound before she could fly at him. She wept with pain and rage. The Chinese boy bared his teeth with delight and made a purring panther-like sound of satisfaction somewhere in the back of his throat.

CHAPTER XII

A BARGAIN

THE amah waylaid Patrick Logan in the lounge. She was scented, powdered, painted, and decked in gay colours like a tropic bird. Her ear-rings and bangles clanked and rattled accompaniment to the cooing words the young man did not understand. She showed her teeth in an ingratiating smile.

"'Fraid I don't understand," he said, "awfully sorry."

The amah continued to smile and to converse in the Malay tongue. Hidden behind the portiere, Ching, the house-boy, watched the interview with rapt attention.

"Oh!" said Logan at last, recognising his property in the hand she held out to him, "it's that! I wondered where I had mislaid it." And he took the cigarette case from her.

"Thanks awfully," he said.

The amah languished and lingered, and Logan,

thinking she was waiting for a tip, put his hand in his pocket.

He produced some dollars and offered them to her. She took them and threw them on the floor, vociferating passionately.

"What on earth!" said Patrick, "what *is* it all about?"

"You've insulted her," said Annabel, who came into the room at the moment.

"She found my cigarette case."

"Wish someone would find mine," said Annabel.

"It will turn up, just as this has done," Patrick consoled her; "there seems to be an epidemic of absent-mindedness about."

Meanwhile the amah went sulkily back to the servants' quarters. She found the house-boy jumping up and down.

"'No *pawned spear*' is the young man '*beautiful as a Malay*,'" he taunted her.

"Vile dog! I would rather be trampled underfoot by him than let you lick my hand. Liar, thief, infidel! I spit in your face."

Literally she did it.

The house-boy wiped his face with a duster which he afterwards threw away.

"Filthy Malay girl," he said. "I have heard the incantations of magic. I know how to call

my ancestors from their graves. With dust and with blood they shall embrace you."

"Ha!" cried the amah shrilly, beside herself with rage, "hear him, this lover of mine."

The cook and the butler both hastened to the scene.

"Boy," said the cook admonishingly, "you are too young to think of love."

"Love!" shrieked Ching, "who spoke of love? What is love? I *hate* the Malay girl. I will kill her."

"You will not kill her," the butler assured him, "for I will tell his honour Rendell, and he will prevent it."

"His honour has a kind heart," said the Chinese boy, "I will explain to his honour."

"There will be no killing."

"We shall see."

"Here is his honour," said the cook, and hurried back to his work.

Jim Rendell was there, in the middle of the compound, looking round him. The colour of his eyes was accentuated to an almost aching blue, in the daylight sunburn of his brick-red face.

"He *sees* with those eyes," whispered the amah, her wrath suddenly subsiding.

"Naturally he sees, not being blind," retorted the house-boy.

"Fool!"

"What's all this?" demanded the master of the house, looking from the girl to the boy.

"Your honour, it is the game," smiled the amah.

"Humph! This boy is too young to play so much," said Jim Rendell, "I must find him *more* work to do."

Ching listened, and looked impenetrably stupid. He allowed the amah to be spokeswoman.

"Your honour, it is my fault," she said, "I stopped him as he passed."

"Very well," said Jim Rendell, "*I've* got no time to waste anyhow; and I don't believe one word you say—not a word," he added, "so be careful. You'll have to get up early in the morning to get the better of me. I'm on the track of your wickedness, I warn you. Where's the *pâwang*?"

"I do not know," said the amah meekly.

"Go into the house," said Jim Rendell, "your mistress wants to see you. She has lost a valuable cigarette case. Gold and diamonds. This is the last article that is going to be lost in my house, and the sooner it's found the better."

"Does your honour accuse me . . ." began the amah.

"I'm not accusing anyone ; I only say *find* it, as you found the silver case and the jade necklace."

"The Lady Harbury's necklace ? " murmured the girl.

"It's not your business whose necklace it is, or was," replied the planter, "for it has disappeared too, as you know well enough. Do as you're told and go into the house."

The amah reluctantly obeyed and Jim Rendell got into the car that awaited him and drove to his office. For the first time in his life he was worried by domestic trifles, indeed by trifles of any sort. In the early days when he cleared the jungle he had taken his life in his hand. Many times he had been forced to hold it very tightly not to let it go. Only a strong personality could dominate 300 coolies, *alone*. The Malays were amiable and docile enough ; their only fault was a disinclination to work. Life is easily maintained in their climate, and a month's work will suffice for a year's indolence to him who owns a palm-thatched hut and a small rice-field. But the Chinamen—they were different. Jim Rendell had always either knocked down a truculent Chinaman, or thrashed him or threatened him, just in time.

The necessity was always to be there first. He had a reputation for an almost superhuman ability to be "on the spot." Perhaps, having won his reputation in those pioneer days, he lived on it and was a little tired. But he had established a tradition. The Chinese coolies often ran, even without reason, when they saw him. His work now was done under the ægis of civilisation. He traversed roads instead of rivers, he owned plantations, offices, clerks. . . . And he was worried about petty things such as jade beads and cigarette cases. . . . He tried to understand why these things annoyed him more than the fact, for instance, that a herd of young wild elephants had mischievously torn up a field full of nicely growing rubber trees during the night. The conundrum irritated him, because no enlightenment came to his mind.

In the bar of the town where a crowd of men congregated, he met John Mallaby.

"Back from Hong Kong!" he greeted him.

"Obviously."

John Mallaby was dark, with iron-grey hair and a sallow skin, sunburned to a sort of muddy-saffron tint. He looked grim and liverish. In the northern latitudes he would have joined the Pussyfoot Brigade, but as desire for, and hatred

of the same thing can grow side by side in one consciousness, so did John Mallaby develop the positive rather than the negative extreme of the force that tempted him. The climate of Malay had found this one weak spot in the armour of Achilles, namely, a thirst unquenchable.

"Have a drink?" suggested Rendell.

"Thanks, and by the way . . ."

"Here's luck!" said Jim.

"Luck!" sneered John Mallaby, "well, I suppose we all have our superstitions . . . mine used to be women, but I got over it. I want to speak to you about my girl. She's been giving way to the devil I suspected was born in her when I saw her red hair. I'm sorry she bothered you, but . . ."

"Who told you she bothered us?" snapped Jim Rendell, "it was only a bit of fun."

"There's fun, and fun," said John Mallaby darkly, "but, when it comes to strolling about your grounds in the dead of night with a married man, I want an explanation."

"Which you won't get from us."

"Won't I?" said the other menacingly.

"You'd drive anybody to hell," said Jim Rendell, "come outside and I'll knock you about a bit."

John Mallaby measured his antagonist, who was muscular, lithe, and full of fire, and he recognised himself physically less fit. He was essentially a business man, and a financier. He had a cold, clear intellect and a dominating personality. Once he had been conscious of a soul—but that was a long time ago.

“I wasn’t proposing to fight you,” he said. “I had something more reasonable in my mind. You’re such a fire-eater. Do you insist on giving cause for entertainment to the rabble in this bar?”

All the younger planters, mine-owners, clerks and government officials with small salaries began to edge near the two big men of the district in the hope of witnessing “some” quarrel.

“My car is outside,” said Jim Rendell.

“So is mine,” declared the other.

“Then, it’s as you were!”

“No,” John Mallaby laid a detaining hand on Jim’s arm. “I will drive with you as far as your house—if you are going there.”

“I am,” said Jim Rendell. “I’m hungry.”

“I’m never hungry,” remarked John Mallaby, “but I suppose we must eat.”

“Such hospitality as I can offer . . . ”

“Thank you,” said Mallaby as he got into Jim’s car, “I haven’t time for it. I want to say a few

words—to make a proposition, that's all ; my girl has been compromised in your house . . . ”

“ Then, by jove you shall make your complaint in the right quarter. I'll stake my life Gerald Harbury didn't ask that girl to come out and meet him. He's my guest. You can fight him with a gun ; he'd like it ; he's a man, and some big-game hunter.”

“ I have not the slightest desire to fight anyone,” declared Mallaby in his cold even voice. “ If you will only keep your temper I will explain what I *do* want. That girl has made a fool of herself. I am prepared to pay a large sum to anyone who will marry her. You have a nephew. He is young. I understand he is not overburdened with the needful. The girl is not unpleasing to look at. Some people even admire her.”

“ The girl ! ” echoed Jim. “ You speak of her as though you hated her. One can hardly believe she is your daughter.”

Mallaby winced.

“ I always hated her red hair,” he said rather lamely, “ no one in my family ever had red hair.”

Jim Rendell stared at him. He would talk this over with Annabel. No, he would talk with his brother.

“ What do you call a large sum ? ” he asked.

" I'll see."

" The sum must be stated."

" You drive a bargain ? "

" I can't bargain with that which is not mine," said Jim, " but I want a statement approximating to the sum you have in mind."

" Say ten thousand pounds."

Jim Rendell laughed. " Say one hundred thousand pounds," he suggested.

" I will make it one hundred thousand pounds," said John Mallaby solemnly. " It is a fortune."

" A very small one considering ; still I suppose she'll come into the rest when you push off the curtain ? "

Mallaby shrugged. " Take it or leave it," he said. " I will not come into your house, I haven't time. You will allow me to return in your car ? Thank you . . . "

Jim Rendell found a party assembled for tiffin in the lounge, and he cursed inwardly. It seemed to him inane and idiotic to have a number of people cackling round the table at that time of day. All he wanted was to eat, and sleep for an hour afterwards, before he returned to his work. He was all agog to consider the proposition of John Mallaby with somebody. Forgetting his resolve to talk it over with his brother first, he

signalled to Annabel after the splendid but informal feast was over. Annabel came to him in the corner of the room where he stood beside a wonderful arrangement of tropical plants, in the midst of which a fountain played and trickled into a well-disguised tank. She was full of her own trouble, namely, that the gold cigarette case was really really gone.

"And why should any of the servants take it?" she asked. They've had thousands of opportunities before. Besides, they wouldn't dare. And—you know there *are* kleptomaniacs about, and worse. Supposing you had a title and no money! It must be an awful nuisance. I've read about titled women at bazaars stealing things from the stalls and they didn't *need* the money, whereas . . . "

"Look here, Annabel, you mustn't suspect people like this. It won't do. It's slanderous, besides I've something interesting to tell you."

"Nothing interests me but my cigarette case," said Annabel, "will you buy me another?"

"You can buy one yourself if you've no sentiment about the one you've lost, I always give you plenty of money; but you mustn't say things about. . . "

"Hush!" whispered his wife, "she'll hear. Fancy you defending her! Are *you* smitten with her too?"

"What do you mean by *too*?" asked Jim.

"You know. What's the use of pretending? They've reached the kissing stage."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Jim, surprised into momentary forgetfulness of the information he had been so anxious to impart. "I couldn't have believed it of her—or him." He paused and looked with increased interest at his nephew. Hitherto he had been content to accept him without understanding him. People who were mysteries did not interest him. They made him impatient. And "pen-shoving," as he phrased it, was not a man's job. Now he began to wonder if his nephew was, after all, a force to be reckoned with. Lady Harbury was not the sort of woman to be intrigued by a nincompoop, though why on earth she couldn't be content with her own husband . . . "

"Jim," said his wife, "what is the matter with you? You have not heard a word of what I have been saying."

"Sorry," he replied, "I was thinking."

"An unusual process," said Annabel.

"If you like. I'm a man of action." He

strode off in the direction of his brother, and buttonholed him, just as he was escaping from the lounge.

"I want to talk to you just for a few minutes," he said, "come into my den; I shan't keep you long, you can go and sleep afterwards."

"Life here is one long symposium," said the doctor. "In the words of a great master, 'the soul of a man is dangerously beset.'"

"But you don't believe in the soul."

"Is that what you want to talk to me about?" asked the doctor.

"No, it's this. Patrick and Lady Harbury have got to the kissing stage in their flirtation. My wife's just told me so."

"How does she know?"

"I forgot to ask her."

"Then the evidence is not weighty so far. Probably some servants told her. The amount of spying and creeping about they do here, Jim, is astonishing. Are they impelled merely by curiosity?"

"No one's ever complained before," said Jim, "and, of course, I am aware you don't agree with me about morals. But you must agree so far that anyhow immorals are inexpedient. They cause annoyance and sometimes grief.

Sometimes also a bit of gun practice. I shouldn't be surprised if Gerald . . . "

The doctor frowned. "Are you not making rather a mountain out of a molehill?" he asked. "Let me assure you that Patrick's temperament is sensitive to a fault. His 'flirtation,' as you call it, is a more delicate sublimation of the animal passion men call love than you dream of. I know him very well. He is always too much bothered by scruples. Later he will be bothered by complexes. I wish he could love someone whom it is possible for him to marry."

"That's just it," said his brother. "I met John Mallaby this morning, and he offers a hundred thousand pounds with his daughter Raymonde. He suggests that Patrick should marry her."

"Good heavens, Jim! A hundred thousand! but—you can't *make* the boy marry her," said the doctor ruefully.

"Why not? Why shouldn't he bow to authority? What's the use of all this freedom that's being given to everybody? Even the Chinamen have cut off their pigtails. Often I've held on to a pigtail when I gave one a thrashing. Much more difficult now. Look at Russia too Bolshevism, that's what it is, everywhere."

“ But Patrick is neither a Bolshevik nor a Chinaman. He’s a super-civilised Englishman and a poet as well.”

“ Poet ! ” ejaculated his brother, “ give him a scratch and I bet you’ll find the savage underneath.”

“ That’s one of the things I’ve been telling you, ever since I’ve been here,” said the doctor.

“ Yes, but I don’t like your way of telling it,” said Jim.

“ Well,” said the doctor, lighting a cigarette, “ I advise you not to get mixed up in other people’s affairs. Ah ! here is Patrick.”

The young man looked from one to the other. “ What’s it all about ? ” he asked.

“ Patrick,” said Jim Rendell, “ I am authorised to offer you one hundred thousand pounds if you will marry Raymonde Mallaby.”

The young man laughed mirthlessly. “ I like to look at her hair anyhow,” he said, “ and money’s money.”

The doctor leaned forward surprised. “ Would you ? What has come over you ? ” he asked.

“ What’s come over everybody ? ” countered Patrick, “ why this royal stunt of arranging my marriage ? ”

“ Are you serious about it ? ” asked Jim

Rendell, who had expected opposition, scorn, even violence.

"I'll tell you to-morrow," said Patrick, and went out of the room.

The brothers stared at one another.

"What is the matter with him?"

"Something has happened."

"Oh!" said Jim, "and there's another bit of news. Patrick speaking of her hair reminds me. You've noticed her red hair?"

"I'm not colour-blind."

"Her father—he's an awfully embittered man, you know—he told me he hated her hair. Said there was no red hair in his family. . . . You needn't sniff. To my mind the whole thing's as plain as a pikestaff."

CHAPTER XIII

THE ENGLISHMAN.

THE pâwang was an absentee from the servants' quarters.

"He has stolen the cigarette case," opined the Chinese cook.

"In that case," remarked the butler, "he is a fool to remain away; he will be suspected."

"What do *you* think?" asked the cook.

"I do not think about such unpleasant matters," replied the butler, "it is unwise to think. Thoughts attract things towards us."

"Pah!" said the cook.

The butler shrugged as one who finds it futile to discuss subtleties with an infidel. The amah and the Chinese boy were busy in the house. Jim Rendell had been as good as his word in finding more work for them to do. At that moment the pâwang appeared on the scene.

"We were speaking of you," said the butler.

"A cigarette case of gold decorated with diamonds has been stolen," said the cook, "you, with your magic, should be able to find it for his honour, even as you found the cat."

"I might do that," said the pâwang, "for a sufficient reward."

"Fool, if you do," said the butler, "his honour will then *know* that you stole it."

"I have not stolen it," said the old man, "but surely I who can find water can also find gold."

The Chinese boy who was passing stopped. "But the magician!" he said, "what will he say? Will you steal it from him?"

The cook and the butler craned their necks, expectant of disclosures.

"Of what magician do you speak?" asked the pâwang, "this boy has dreams—I must cure him. Boy, look at me; look in my eyes."

The Chinese boy looked, and his own eyes glazed somewhat.

"Of what did you speak?" commanded the pâwang.

"I spoke of a dream," replied the boy, meekly.

"Then wake, and go about your business."

The boy hurried away.

"What power!" exclaimed the butler.

The cook sniffed.

"Here is Haji, his honour's personal servant," said the pâwang, with brightening eyes, "without doubt he will give us news of the cigarette case."

Haji was importantly dressed in white duck trousers and coat, and was wearing a straw hat his master had given him. His lank hair was cropped very close, and the brilliantly coloured handkerchief which erst had adorned his head now bulked above the lapel of his coat pocket.

"Something will happen in that house, presently," commented Haji.

"I always said so," said the pâwang, "long ago I warned them. With my incantations I could have drawn away the evil spirits that threatened."

The valet shrugged. He regarded himself as almost an Englishman, though he deprecated many of their ways. So it behoved him to be sceptical and cynical. "They are not the frail spirits who follow you from the plantations," he observed, "but they are spirits even as you and I who will bring about the happenings."

"There is not much difference," said the pâwang, "between a spirit clad in the flesh and one without such garment."

"You go beyond me," said Haji, relighting a half-smoked cigar, "but I know many other things."

"Tell us some of them," chorused the pâwang, the Chinese cook and the butler, all together.

"There is the Englishman with the glass eye," said Haji, "he will presently run amok. Yesterday the red-haired girl who wanders about in the middle of the night was with him in his room. His wife rides out in the early morning with the young man who is the nephew of his honour. She also sits with him in the Pavilion. They talk and talk. It is surprising that they waste so much time."

"We know all this," said the butler, "but we do not know why the Englishman with the glass eye should run amok."

"In a drawer the Englishman who is the husband of the lady who loves the young man," said Haji . . . "in a drawer, as I said, he keeps a small gun. And he is always looking at it. Every time he enters the room he looks at it."

"What of that? He is a hunter, he desires to shoot a tiger."

"Ah! but this gun is the kind with which Englishmen shoot each other."

"Are they allowed to do that?" asked the butler, in a puzzled voice.

"They are allowed to do what they dare do," said the Chinese cook.

Haji glanced with dislike at the infidel. "They dare a good deal," he admitted. "It was a Chinaman his honour thrashed in Singapore—a Chinaman who dared to insult an Englishman. His honour thrashed him in the market place. The man was rich, but he was held up to scorn."

"There was a noise about it," averred the cook, sulkily. "I remember it; even an Englishman may not thrash a Chinaman in the market place."

"But we are far from the subject that really interests us," said the pâwang, seeing a quarrel was imminent, "whom do you suppose the one-eyed Englishman intends to shoot?"

"He is not one-eyed," contradicted Haji, "he only carries the glass eye as an ornament, and he looks through it when he is angry—or amused; not when he is interested, for I watched him the day before yesterday. He received an envelope through the post, and in his own room he read the contents that were in the envelope without the aid of his glass eye. He has read it several times. It is in the drawer with the little

gun. He reads it often. I, myself, have tried to read it, but I do not know enough of their language. Therefore I cannot tell you what it is about."

"Then why speak of it?" said the cook.

"You asked me for news."

"Of the cigarette case."

"I know nothing of it," said Haji, crossly, "and I do not wish to think about it."

"Ah! but the gun," said the pâwang. "what of the gun. Whom say you he will shoot?"

"He will shoot the woman if he is *wise*," suggested the cook.

"I think he intends to shoot the young man," said the pâwang, seriously.

"That Englishman will not shoot *anyone* in the back," declared Haji.

"What will he do then?"

It was the amah who had slipped into the circle like a noiseless ghost, and put this question. Haji, when he saw her, walked away; he was averse to discussing great affairs with women.

"What is this business?" chimed in another voice, that of Ching, the house-boy.

"*You* ask," said the butler, "*you* question your superiors, boy! Your business is to receive orders, and to obey them. I have work

for you to do, go now and collect glass and silver from the houses."

"You trust him with glass and silver?" sneered the amah.

"Go with him, girl, and see that he neither breaks the glass nor steals the silver," commanded the butler. "I am arranging a scheme of great beauty, decorating the table with Honolulu flowers, a pool of ice, and a fountain and much silver. There are people of importance coming from Hong Kong, and I desire to dazzle their eyes."

"There is enough in the house," grumbled the amah, unwilling to depart on this quite usual quest of borrowing silver from the servants of a neighbour in order to enhance the splendour of a dinner party; "what if Mallaby is having a party? and his is the only house where there is really fine silver."

"For that reason I command you to get it, there is too much Chinese silver in this house—it reflects no honour on me to decorate my table with Chinese silver."

The amah and the house-boy started on their errand, at one, for the moment, in their rebellious feelings against the butler.

"Boy," said the amah, in a wheedling voice, "I will trust you with the silver."

She turned and sped in the direction of Bamboo Grove, leaving the house-boy in a turmoil of mixed passions. Why had she been so anxious to go back? . . . There was always a method in her madness. . . .

As for him—well, they expected him to steal. . . .

CHAPTER XIV

THE PAGAN

ON a beautiful antique tray, the amah brought Lady Harbury a very ordinary-looking chit. It was addressed to her in a round untrammelled hand. The girl waited, so the lady supposed she must answer the note, whoever it was from. Tearing it open, she read as follows :

DEAR LADY HARBURY,

I stole Annabel's cat, just for fun (don't tell) and I twisted my jade beads round his neck. He ran away (or someone took him) and the amah took my beads (I know this, I saw her do it ; I was riding along your drive). When I asked her for them, she said she had given them to you. *Do* give them back to me, because if you don't my father will be angry with me, and I'm afraid of him.

RAYMONDE.

Lady Harbury stared at this surprising epistle. Then a hot wave flooded her face. She had forgotten all about the beads. And where had she put them? Realising that the Malay girl still waited for an answer to the note, she quickly scribbled a few lines to the effect that she would look for the jade beads and return them as soon as they were found. When the girl was gone, the lady endeavoured to send her mind back to the incident. She remembered taking the necklace and saying, "It is mine," and she blushed as she realised why she had done this. It was simply through an ordinary fit of jealousy, a savage quality she disdained. For a moment she had supposed that Raymonde had been in the pavilion. Truly, having sinned against her code, which was the code of pride, manners and taste, she had suffered. And it seemed likely that she would suffer even more. Suddenly she realised another aspect of the situation. The manner of her hostess had chilled in the last two days. The reason of it became painfully clear to Lady Harbury. Annabel suspected her of claiming Raymonde's necklace; nay, Annabel *knew* she had claimed Raymonde's necklace. She had been present when she did it.

Really, she thought, I've behaved like an

absolute fool ; and what did I do with the necklace ? She remembered holding it up to Patrick Logan, but she remembered nothing more. Rack her brains as she might, the necklace after that moment vanished into blank space. Ergo, Patrick Logan took the necklace and probably put it in his pocket and forgot all about it.

I will go into the pavilion presently, she thought, and ask him.

From her window she could see just the top of the pavilion through the shrubs. Beyond, stretched a glorious view. Sideways through the trees and mangroves she could see some of the servants standing in a group and chattering to each other. I wonder what they are saying, she thought, and why do they take such an interest in us ? I wonder if one of them stole Annabel's cigarette case ? Or do they suspect . . . they *might* suspect the person who stole the jade necklace. She grew hot at the thought. Her instinct was to fly to Gerald and tell him all about it. He had often said, " rely on me." She lifted the reed blind that divided her from the entrance to his room. He was not there, and she had time to reflect that he would wonder why she had declared the necklace to be hers. She wished that Gerald and Patrick could be fused into one.

The poet provided a thrill, her husband gave her a sense of security. She had thought about him a good deal since she had heard Raymonde declare that he was not a milksop like Patrick Logan, nor a brute like John Mallaby. Gerald was certainly no milksop, neither was he a brute. And he was very good-looking. But he lacked something. So also did Patrick Logan lack something. The lack in Gerald was on the intellectual side, although undoubtedly he observed and realised much more than he could, or would, express. The lack in Patrick Logan was indefinable. As for Gerald, "I love him? I love him not?" murmured Lady Harbury to herself. "I love him *not*, and in a fortnight I am going with him to Hong Kong!"

Gerald came into the room. "What!" he said, "you . . . are you bothered about something?"

"You don't think," faltered his wife, "that they suspect me . . . of . . . taking that gold cigarette case?"

"Suspect *YOU*!" echoed Gerald aghast, "who does?"

"It's only an idea that came into my mind."

"Darling," said Gerald, "what put it there?"

"It came by itself, blew in from somewhere, I

suppose"; she recovered her airy manner, but he frowned.

"But there must be some sort of kind of reason for your thinking it," he persisted, "tell me."

"I can't, it's a vapour diffused by the heat, it is overwhelmingly hot to-day."

"Are you tired of it?" he asked. "Do you want to go to Hong Kong?"

"No," she replied.

"Perhaps you won't have to go after all," he promised her.

She felt frightened. What course was he intending to pursue? He had an unusually definite look.

"What do you mean, Gerald?"

Instead of answering, he looked at her speculatively. "I'm wondering what you'll do when you've got only *me* to talk to," he said.

She made no reply.

"Of course, I know I ain't up to you," said Gerald, "but—you can *rely* on me."

"Thank you," said his wife, and went back to her own room. She surveyed herself in the cheval glass. She wore a white lace dress, with a belt made of big square pieces of turquoise. In her ears were turquoises set in filigree gold. She liked colour, and was dissatisfied with the

dull hue of her thick and wavy hair. If only it had been a "glorious Titian gold!" She would have given her intellect and her taste for unqualified beauty of person. She was tall and slim and elegant enough, and most people thought her handsome—beauty is a matter of opinion, of course, but a superlative degree of it commands—love. There is nothing else, thought Lady Harbury, nothing. She was pagan to the bone. After all, why not? Nature is pagan in her dealings with all her creatures, particularly with women. She hated Nature, though some aspects of the goddess were well enough—especially on a fine day. And Nature was kind to women, in their youth. Afterwards? She simply threw them away, without even the kindly death which is the fate of the lower animals when it is time for them to make room for others. . . . How long shall I sit in the shade, she wondered . . . twenty . . . thirty years? So let me go out in the sun, To-day.

She put on a shady picturesque hat draped with a gauze veil. Her cheeks were pale, so just the merest touch of rouge added to the brilliance of her hazel eyes. With her head slightly tilted on one side she surveyed the picture in the cheval glass. It was satisfactory.

She walked across the lawn to the pavilion, and on the way she picked a red flower and tore off the petals one by one. Not "*he* loves me, he loves me not," but "*I* love him? *I* love him not?" "*I* love him *not*" declared the last red leaf. But which one was it she loved, or not? So intricate were the processes in her mind that she was unable to answer that question herself. I wish I were like Raymonde, she thought. One day she is as good as she wants to be, and the next she is as bad as she wants to be, and as she never suffers from either regret or remorse they call her a divided personality. If one could only forget yesterday when it is happier to forget yesterday. . . .

Patrick Logan's idea was, that one should have a code of morals to lapse from. She reflected that his code had served him no better than her taste had served her—not so well, for she had been saved from being swept away to the Seychelles, and—so far—from entering into the more *sordid* by-paths of an intrigue. . . . She picked another red flower and took it into the pavilion with her.

"How I wondered if you were coming to-day," sighed Patrick.

"Well, here I am! Now look and listen." She began to pick the flower to pieces; this time it ended in "I love him."

"You see . . . you love me," said Patrick.

"How do you know it's you?" she asked.

Patrick went to the other side of the room as though to put distance between them. "You play with me," he accused her.

"I do not desire to play with you. You forget that friendship, platonic—neo-platonic?—was our first idea. Now it seems different. I confess I do not understand myself."

"But I understand you," he declared eagerly.

"Do you? I wonder! Tell me, is it possible to love two people at once?"

"Is it possible! *You* ask me that?"

"For heaven's sake," implored the lady "don't say '*you*' to me in that tone. You remind me of Gerald when he compares me to a star. Nothing makes me feel so much aloof and so horribly lonely. I should so much like to be at home with somebody. I believe that's all I want, really."

"Why not with me then?" said Patrick. "I love you desperately. I would give up all the world for you. I can't tell you in my own words how my life 'is eaten out and in, with the

face of you, the eyes of you, the lips, the little chin.' And it's not only like that. There is something in your soul which responds to mine. I think—you also think—it is a memory of long ago. You make me entirely miserable. I love you, and you play with me."

"No," said Lady Harbury.

"What else?"

"I've told you."

"You love nobody, neither me nor your husband. I could forgive you, if you loved—even—him."

"If I love nobody," said Lady Harbury, "it is because nobody is possessed of all the chords which will re-echo in my own soul. When I first saw you, I was thrilled by you. I love your eyes and your straight brows and the way your hair sweeps from your forehead. Your voice appeals to me. We both like the same things. We have the same outlook more or less. But—we've said everything and there seems nothing left to say; and, when you've said everything, it's all over."

"Pagan," groaned her lover, but he thought of his attempted poem, the sonnet to Rose—all had been said about Roses.

"I am that, and I wish I were not. I tried

religion once. The Church of Rome always appealed to me ; it does still. Sensuous ? What of that, so that the soul is reached ? Why should the senses be spurned ? I like the idea that nothing is too beautiful or too grand for the temples erected to God. I love the incense and all the symbols. I have lit candles often in the church in Farm Street. But I am outside it still, although I think the Church of Rome is the one living Church. But they want you to swallow too much. Perhaps some day I shall swallow it all for the sake of its beautiful ritual, unless of course there arises 'The New Star in the East !' But no, let it be in the west this time."

"Isn't Christianity good enough ?"

"Its priests and votaries have killed it."

"I don't think they have," said Patrick rather lamely ; he was looking at the door. It had opened and revealed Annabel.

"Spooking ?" she laughed.

"In broad daylight ?"

"I believe you are," she said, and closed the door again.

"Now why ?" began Lady Harbury.

"Never mind," said Patrick, sitting closer to her, "the point is that you declared we had said everything, and you've just said ever so

many new things. I think we shall always have new things to say to each other."

"Even so—" said the lady, "our ways divide. I am going to Hong Kong."

"And I ask you to come somewhere with me."

"I told you I wouldn't. It *never* is a success. Besides, I am older than you."

"How much! One would think there was twenty years of difference between us."

"Ten or twenty—it's all the same in time. Men think so much about age. I despise them for it."

Patrick buried his face in his hands. He felt tired. His spirit flagged. He realised that the sublimated essence of a *grande passion* was not what he wanted. It was all very well to write poetry. . . . He was complex himself and subtlety in another was not anodyne. In the reaction of that moment his spirit turned to—Violet? No, she was a shadow—a purple shadow—nothing more.

Annabel joined her husband who had returned from the day's work.

"I looked in, and there they were, just sitting," she said, "quite a long way apart too; and what do you think they were talking about?"

"First of all, who are *you* talking about?"

"Why, Rose Harbury and Patrick of course."

"Oh!—they're a pair of fools."

"Well, but what *do* you think they were talking about? Christianity."

"And a very good thing too."

"Jim," said Annabel, after a long silence, "some people are different from us."

"Good luck to them."

"You're impossible," said Annabel crossly, and settled down to read about a romantic silent strong man, and a much tried beautiful girl.

After some time Lady Harbury and Patrick Logan came into the lounge. In her complicated soul the lady also was conscious of a reaction. . . .

"Ah ha!" cried Jim Rendell to his nephew. "Young man, what about to-morrow? It's here—now."

"What do you mean?" asked Patrick staring at his uncle. He had forgotten all about the bargain of yesterday and wondered if Jim Rendell had a touch of the sun. Annabel, too, stared at her husband and hoped he was not about to "spring a fit"; how could to-morrow be here and now?

"Is it to be yes or no?" asked Jim, "the hundred thousand and the girl, or not?"

"Good God!" said Patrick, and sat down because he felt, for the first time in his life, incapable of standing up, "I had forgotten all about it."

"What is it?" Annabel and Rose demanded anxiously together.

"John Mallaby wants to get his daughter off," said Jim, "and he rather fancies a member of my family for a son-in-law; in a word, Patrick."

"But he's never seen him," objected Annabel.

"He's seen *me*," said Jim Rendell, slapping his chest.

"But how extraordinary," said Annabel. "I thought . . ."

Not a word said Lady Harbury. Patrick looked at her. "Of course," he said, "it's out of the question. I didn't take you seriously."

"A hundred thousand!"

"Oh! Money!" returned the young man scornfully.

"You spoke differently yesterday."

Lady Harbury began to move out of the lounge. "This is such an intimate family discussion," she murmured.

Patrick plunged after her. "Can I help their absurd propositions?" he asked.

"It seems to me admirable in every way," said the lady in a cold voice. "A hundred thousand pounds, too; that's quite a lot of money. And think of the hair, that 'glorious Titian gold' which I called ginger. Do you remember? The first day we met. To you, a poet, it must be an inspiration like . . . what is it . . .

"Thy gold hair's colour burns in me,

Thy mouth makes beat my feverish blood
in rhymes.'"

"—Only it doesn't," said Patrick. "Rose, are you going to throw me over?"

"Within the next fortnight, yes, as I warned you." She went out of the lounge, and he followed her.

"Cruel."

The young man looked so distressed that she took pity on him. "There's still a fortnight," she whispered.

He kissed her.

Someone came along the passage and almost bumped into them. It was Gerald.

"What?" he said, adjusting his monocle. It was impossible to tell if he had seen, or not.

"A marriage has been arranged," said Lady

Harbury rather breathlessly, "between Mr. Patrick Logan and Miss Mallaby."

Gerald looked from one to the other. He refrained from offering congratulations to one who was so evidently down and out as Logan seemed to be.

"It's not true," said the young man angrily. "Nothing will induce me to marry her."

"She's a tough proposition," Gerald said.

He followed his wife into her room. "Is that right?" he asked.

"Something like that. *They* want him to marry her anyhow."

"Do you care?"

"Care!" said Lady Harbury, rising with dignity, although her voice was tired. "What *do* you mean, Gerald?"

He began to feel in the wrong, although he had seen the kissing. There was something in her which rebuffed him always at the moment when he began to draw near her—just as there was something in him which served as a barrier against her. It was devilish. He had an odd feeling that a monsoon, a tornado, a tidal wave, an earthquake, something of that kind was needed to bring them together. For he loved her. He marshalled all his forces and said suddenly:

“ If you have kissed that youth . . . ”

“ I have,” she said defiantly.

“ Well, if you have, you have, and I suppose I must forgive you . . . but don’t make a practice of it.”

Once more he went and looked lovingly at his revolver.

CHAPTER XV

THE PINK LETTER

THE amah devoted every spare moment she had to watching the doings of the house-boy. She was so preoccupied with this that she had no time to observe the doings of other people. And, when she was not watching the house-boy, she was busy attending to her mistress and Lady Harbury. Annabel was arranging a large impromptu dance, and life in the bungalow buzzed with a tornado of telephone calls and chits.

"And what for, I should like to know?" demanded her husband.

"I'll show them," said Annabel, "that I can do a dance in two days, and do it better than those pimps in official circles who look down on me can do in two months of solemn preparations. I've engaged the Royal Red Fusiliers' band from Singapore."

"The devil you have," said her husband.

"And are many of your hostile friends from official circles likely to be present?"

"You bet," said Annabel. "They've, nearly all of them, accepted. Aren't they going to meet a real live baronet—the tenth, isn't he?—and Rose related to earls and all that?"

Jim Rendell grinned. His wife seldom hinted at her grievances against the "Government crowd," who, as she had just averred, "looked down" on her.

"Well, I hope they'll all enjoy it as much as *you* will," he said.

This dance, thought the amah, will probably give the young infidel an opportunity to fulfil his wicked design, whatever it may be. He intended to kill the young man "beautiful as a Malay." It was not an idle boast, for she had seen hate concentrating in his eyes for days. She herself was the cause of this hatred, but she found the temptation to provoke it irresistible. It poured balsam over her seething emotions to know that Ching, though he was a mere boy, was willing to kill a man for her sake. She was not averse to the idea that Patrick Logan should suffer, because in her opinion he had spurned her; he regarded her as nothing, he did not even see her; but, if he must suffer, *she* would like to

inflict the pain. Besides, she argued, if the Chinese dog commits murder, they will hang him, unless he is clever enough not to be found out. She had no desire to see the boy hanged, because she was unwilling to lose so sincere a lover. If only he were older and could carry her off! Then her Malay relations, furious that one of their race and faith should marry an infidel, would pursue them with knives and there would be a fight; blood would be shed. After all, what else is there to relieve the tedium of life? Even men weary of their cock-fighting and hunting, and other sports. Love and War—War and Love. . . .

The amah, taking advantage of the absence of the house-boy, whom she knew to be engaged in a perpetual jog-trot after her mistress because of the arrangements for the dance, went into Ching's bedroom. Swiftly she turned over the contents of each drawer, and opened the lids of all the boxes. Even under the bed she looked, and there she found the sealed tea-chest which the boy had brought back from the magician's hut in the marshes by the river. She lifted it up suspiciously. It was heavy. Why was it sealed? What could it contain?

Even as she asked herself the question, a pair

of virile hands seized her dress from behind. Remembering how once before she had suffered from the nails digging into her flesh, she dropped the box and stood up.

“ Hah ! ” said the boy, “ you spy on me, thief, black face, you are in my room, I will keep you here.”

The amah struggled to get away, but she was impotent in the grip of those murderous hands.

“ Murderer,” she said, “ I will give evidence against you ; you will be hanged in Singapore.”

Ching shook her violently.

“ You hurt me,” she cried.

“ I will hurt you more,” he said, “ why did you look in my box ? ”

“ I did not look, fool, how could I when the box is sealed ? Be less harsh with me. I am a woman, and therefore curious. Is it so great a fault ? ”

When she spoke like that, with her face close to his and her langourous eyes raised beseechingly, the Chinese boy felt a strange quality creep through his emotions. It was as though his bones turned to water. He flattened his face against hers, which gave her an opportunity of biting him, but somehow the pain of the bite seemed on this occasion almost pleasant. He dropped a

letter which had slipped into his wide sleeve, and endeavoured to embrace her. She eluded the embrace and picked up the letter. It was pink, scented, and addressed to Patrick Logan.

"Give it to me," said the boy, "it came through the post. I must deliver it to him."

The amah stared at the letter, as though by this means she might sense its contents. She admired the colour, but :

"I care not for the scent," she said. "It is from a woman—over the sea," she added.

Even its long journey had not divested the pink paper of its patchouli.

"I will deliver the letter to his honour Logan," said the amah, coolly putting it inside her jacket.

With a shriek of rage the Chinese boy tore at her jacket and rescued the letter. With one hand in her jacket, which with torn fastenings now revealed a little too much of her brown skin, and the other on the letter, the amah was dragged after the Chinese boy, who was determined to deliver it to the owner himself. In desperation, letting her jacket fly, the amah gripped the Chinese boy by the arm, and they hurled down the steps together, finally spinning like a double top across the compound. Eventually they had to be torn apart by Haji and the

cook, and the letter was also torn in two pieces.

"Ah!" the Chinese boy cried out. "Look! Look!!!"

Another antagonist had entered into the fray. No other than Annabel's pet monkey. He had endured pain and humiliation at the hands of the Chinese boy, and here, it may be, he saw a chance of getting back on him. So he sprang, snatched the half letter out of the boy's hand, bounded swiftly up to the top of a tall tree and began tearing the pink paper into bits.

The cook shrugged. "Such things do you bring about with your foolish . . . love," he said.

"The letter was for his honour Logan," said the Chinese boy.

"There is only one thing to do now," said Haji, "and that is, to tear the rest of it up."

The amah considered this plan for a moment. Then she hurried away in the direction of the pavilion. She met Gerald strolling casually under the trees.

"He keeps watch," thought the girl.

"Hallo! What!" said Gerald. He did not care to be seen near the meeting place of his wife and Patrick Logan just because dull-minded people might think he was spying on them, which

nothing would have induced him to do, but—the pavilion fascinated him. He always walked round that way if he wanted to walk anywhere, although it was hardly a short cut. As he went in the direction of the house, he turned round and saw the Malay girl open the door and go in.

“ I’m blowed ! ” he said.

Patrick Logan was sitting alone, writing, or trying to write. He had before him his uncle’s book on the New Psychiatry, for which he was making a glossary. The Malay girl accosted him with an amazing flow of words. She gesticulated wildly, she pointed to a tree outside. He looked through the reed blind, but saw nothing unusual in the tree. He shook his head. Then his eye fell on the pink fragment. “ What’s this ? ” he asked.

Again the Malay girl talked—and talked. Patrick looked at the letter. Its colour and its perfume nauseated him. It was from Violet, of course. Was he never to escape from the consequences of his folly in France ? It had been sheer inexcusable folly. No, not quite inexcusable, for the girl was beautiful, really gloriously beautiful, and beauty was something. Rose Harbury thought it was everything. Only—it is not everything. Here was a case in point.

Violet was more beautiful than Rose. She was also quite young—about twenty. But she had no soul, and she had resisted culture. She had almost resisted education. Only in the equalising atmosphere of *battle, murder and sudden death* had it been possible to be blind to these defects. But her chestnut hair and her complexion, her eyes and nose and mouth and chin were worthy of an enslaver of kings. He looked at the fragment of letter, wondering where the rest of it was. The words did not interest him. He saw “no other,” and “never,” and “wait.” What business had she to wait—for him? If she couldn’t have him she would have nobody? It gave him a horrible persecuted feeling. “I suppose I told her I loved her,” he said. “I suppose I *must* have loved her—in a way, or I shouldn’t have told her so. And she means to have me or nobody! Well, she shan’t have me.”

He buried his face in his hands and reflected bitterly that he seemed doomed to become involved with women. Just for a moment he hated them all—even Rose. There must be a flaw in Rose’s soul, a kink of some sort or she would never have married Gerald Harbury. And she was calculating, she was incapable of feeling “love and the world well lost.” He could

no longer unreservedly worship her. He could not say as Dante said, "that lady of whom enamoured is my soul." His *soul* was no longer enamoured. It was bitterly steeped in life, which meant disillusionment.

An hour passed. All this time the Malay girl had been sitting motionless in a corner. She was not happy but she was entranced in an unusual situation. She breathed the same air as the young man who seemed to her so beautiful. He was unhappy. That was well. She wished that the Lady Harbury would come in. Then she, that arrogant, proud, ugly, stupid woman, who threw away love and wasted time, would wonder why she—the amah—was there. She smiled at the thought. How jealous she would be! Or would she be jealous? The blood of these English women was as the blood of fishes, love and jealousy were unknown to them. For, she argued, there can be no love without jealousy. Suddenly Patrick looked up and saw her.

"Hallo!" he said, surprised.

She smiled sympathetically.

"Thanks so much," he said, "I don't in the least understand what you've done with the rest of the letter, but I assure you it's of no consequence."

The amah merely continued to smile. Patrick got up and opened the door for her. Reluctantly she went out, but before he could close the door she swiftly seized his hand, and kissed it. He banged the door and wiped his hand with his handkerchief. But there had been a witness of this proceeding. Gerald had offered to go and look for the amah, because Annabel, almost in tears, wanted the girl for a hundred reasons. It must be recorded that he looked everywhere before he went near the pavilion. He was unwilling to believe that Patrick Logan, who had the good luck to interest his wife, should also seek to interest a little brown savage and a servant to boot. But it was more than an hour since he had seen the Malay girl go into the pavilion, and she could only be there, alone with Patrick Logan, he argued, for the usual reason. He knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Logan.

Gerald entered, and, without greeting or preamble, came to the point. "What are you doing with the Malay girl?" he questioned.

"Is it your business?" asked Patrick, his temper rising.

"Yes," said Gerald, "it is. You have often met my wife here; I don't like it, but I trust her,

although . . . well!—never mind. The point is, *you insult her by having anything to do with a Malay girl*—in the same place, too.”

“What!” said Patrick, springing up. “How dare you . . .”

“Dare!” said Gerald. “Dare!—Are you anything of a shot?”

“I’ve been in the Army.”

“That ain’t saying much. Some people—Have you a revolver?”

“I have not.”

“You must get one, there are plenty in the house, even Annabel has a revolver—we’ll fight it out.”

“A duel! with revolvers?”

“*Faute de mieux.*”

“This is the twentieth century.”

“Worse luck.”

“A duel——”

“Would you prefer me to thrash you?”

Patrick breathed a sigh of passionate anger. “I’ll fight you,” he said, with white-hot calm, “in any way you please—— I love your wife,” he continued defiantly. “*You* don’t appreciate her.”

“Don’t I? There’s not room for both of us in the world—for you and me, I mean. As for

my wife, you insult her by even *thinking* that you love her."

"She knows that I adore her. I asked her to come away with me."

"I do not believe you," said Gerald. "She would never listen to such impertinent nonsense."

"I should add that she refused," said Patrick, bitterly.

"If she listened she probably thought you had lost your reason—such as it is. She is kind, she humoured you."

Patrick shrugged.

"So you will avenge what you call your honour," he said.

"*Her* honour," corrected Gerald. "I warn you I can shoot."

"I am not afraid," said Patrick. "Shall we have it out here and now, as the old grand manner of pistols and coffee in the early morning with seconds is hardly possible. My uncle has a revolver, I will go and get it."

"All right," said Gerald, "I'll come with you." He seemed afraid to let the young man out of his sight.

But their plan for an immediate settlement was doomed to frustration. In the distance could

be seen Annabel and Rose, accompanied by Raymonde, strolling towards them.

"P'raps the early morning, before anyone's about, *is* better," said Gerald quickly.

"Perhaps your blood will have cooled by then "

"I don't blow hot and cold."

Very well then," said Patrick.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TROPIC NIGHT

PATRICK now asked himself what he had been thinking all this time about the husband of Rose, and he was forced to admit that he had not considered him at all. Quite suddenly, Gerald vehemently and violently demanded consideration. And only one deduction could reasonably be made from his conduct, namely, that he loved his wife ; and, being assured that she did not care for him, he had gone mad and was evidently " amok." And in a horrible moment of self-revelation, Patrick realised that not for any woman in the world would *he* be likely to "*run amok.*" Ergo, Gerald loved Rose more than he, Patrick, loved her.

Gerald, who, save that his well-featured face looked less agreeable than usual, and that he snapped rather than spoke, was nonchalant to

a degree. He perceived that Rose markedly avoided Patrick ; he knew by her aloof and disdainful air that she was making the young man feel a worm, as she had so often made him, her husband, feel a worm. He jumped to the conclusion that she was angry, and that she felt slighted, because her lover was actually considering a marriage contract. His fingers itched for the trigger of his revolver ; his inner being mentally bridged the space of time when he would send that young man buzzing into eternity. He had wished for an earthquake, a tornado, a tidal wave, something which would alter things. It was no use wishing. A wish *may* be a sort of wireless to the powers that rule the world ; in this case it had not reached their station out somewhere in space. Therefore Gerald had to bring about something definite himself. He had always believed in the officership of his own soul.

In the servants' quarters, Haji and the amah sat in conclave. The butler and Ching were busy clearing away the dinner dishes. Haji was in a very good humour, for, in addition to the strong cocktail he had drunk earlier in the evening, he had drained a half-emptied bottle of champagne of its contents. His head responded quickly to

alcohol; he was permeated by a feeling of well-being, and a desire to establish an *entente cordiale* with somebody, even a girl of low degree. . . .

"There will be a noise to-morrow," he confided to the amah; "a most exciting noise. Mark my words!"

"You speak in riddles."

"Riddles, no, but a proverb I will tell you. I do not remember any others, but this one suits the occasion—'*What is cracked must break.*'"

"The proverb is well enough," said the amah, "and possible to understand, but not to apply to the thing spoken of without further indication."

"You are slow! After all, you are a woman," declared Haji, pompously. "I will tell you in plain words. Come nearer, for I will not speak loudly. The two Englishmen fight in the morning with guns."

"Which two Englishmen?"

"Are all women fools? There are four Englishmen staying in the house. Is it likely that the two brothers fight?"

The amah stared at him. "How do you know this?" she asked.

"Never mind how I know. I am to call them early in the morning."

"How can it be stopped?" asked the Malay girl.

"Stopped! Why should it be stopped? Would you stop a cock-fight? It is sport; it is the game."

The amah said no more. Presently she slipped into the house.

The air was heavy with the electric weight of an impending storm. Annabel had warned her guests that a thunderstorm in these latitudes was terrific. Yet she failed to impress any of them sufficiently to make them sit up until it broke.

"What nonsense," said Jim Rendell; "you may as well be in one place as in another."

"Some people like company," said Annabel.

"I would rather be afraid, alone," declared Rose.

The heavy atmosphere seemed to weigh on everyone. Jim Rendell at last yawned and declared he would go to bed, and that he would sleep like a top through it all. When Rose went into her room the first heavy peals of thunder already shook the house to its foundations. There flashed great sheets of fire, accompanied

by floods of rain. Sometimes a forked streak of lightning quivered across the veranda. As an example of Nature's exhibition of her power it was colossal. Gerald opened the door of his wife's room.

"Would you really rather be afraid, alone?" he asked her.

"Afraid!" she answered; "why should I be afraid at all?"

"You ought to be," said her husband; "look!" He pointed to the veranda, where the lightning had left a palm burnt and dead. The lightning seemed to play round him while he drew the Kelantan curtains close. "Now come further away from it," he said, taking her hand and dragging her further into the room.

"How sweet of you to look after me like this," she murmured.

He glanced wistfully at her, but quickly recovered his sang-froid. It would be of no use he decided, to try to establish confidential relations. She didn't care about him, and there was an end of it. And she had such a way of making him feel that she surveyed him from a higher plane. He was rather tired of it. He wished he didn't love her, but it was no use wishing—"so that's that," he concluded.

As for Rose, she was aware that he sat with his chair before hers, so that if a shaft of lightning shot through to them it would strike *him*. She had no idea how lightning worked, but she loved him for trying to protect her even against the storm. It might be absurd. It was also sublime.

When at last the storm ceased, he got up from his chair. "So long!" he said.

"Good night, Gerald," replied his wife, in a soft voice. He turned and put his hands on her shoulders. Her hair reached only to the level of his chin. He waited until she raised her head, then bent and kissed her, and without another word went into his room. Once more he looked affectionately at the weapon in the drawer. After that he slept "the sleep of the just."

Rose Harbury stared at the door which closed behind him. She had a numbed feeling of exasperation. Life played one such silly tricks. She felt angry, humiliated and disillusioned, and she knew that she had been her own enemy. Perhaps the climate was in some measure to blame—at least she hoped so. The perpetual sunshine and the glamour of bright colours, the sights and sounds of the East, these things stimulated the blood and made one reckless.

Very truly was it said that morals were conditioned by climate. But manners and pride and taste ought not to be conditioned by climate. She felt she had cheapened herself ; she had not been deliberate, as was her wont. She had looked into a pair of grey eyes and forgotten her code. She remembered that she had compared Patrick favourably with Gerald because the former had looked into her eyes when they met, and had not scanned her points as Gerald was wont to do. And she had learned that, though the eyes are called the windows of the soul, the soul seldom looks through them. The thing which looks through these windows is a physical, sensuous thing. Everything is physical and sensuous, she thought, and all the philosophies and theosophies are mere—camouflage.

On her dressing-table were a few fragments of pink paper. While she was walking in the garden that afternoon they had dropped down before her from above. Looking up a tree whose fronds spread a wide shade, she had perceived Annabel's pet monkey, Het-su, and she had picked up the pink paper. " Whose letter have you eaten, you wicked thing?" she had remonstrated.

On one piece of paper was inscribed the word

"Violet" and also the word "love." On the other, which was part of an envelope, Patrick's name was written. Lady Harbury rescued the remaining pieces of the letter and they lay now in a small heap on her table. She would not read what the other fragments contained, and it was inadvertently she had read anything at all, but having read Violet—love—Logan . . . now it was Rose. But happily there would be no pieces of paper, pink or otherwise, to commemorate the fact that *Rose* had once believed in the illusion of love, to say nothing of the soul and "all the ages." She laughed bitterly. Poetry and neo-platonism! These were the thin veils with which was disguised a very common passion. Violet, Rose, Raymonde! To be one of a company! She was furious with herself more than with the young man, who, after all, had been willing to throw all the future might hold for him on the altar of that which he believed to be worthy of epic song.

Patrick also, in the storm and after-hush of the tropic night, was contemplating the futility of things. He wished now he had guided his life by the searching principles of psycho-analysis. It kept one in a constant state of disillusionment. It was disagreeable, arid, final. It stripped love

of all the artificial rose-coloured shades which shed a glamour over what are called affairs of the heart. And in doing this it simplified life. If he had believed in it, he would not have been so foolish as to talk to Rose Harbury about her soul—and his own.

“Ages past the soul existed, here an age ’tis
resting merely,
And hence fleets again for ages: while the
true end sole and single
It stops here for is, this love-way with some
other soul to mingle.”

As the words of Robert Browning’s “Cristina” came into his mind, in spite of himself, his consciousness began to throb again to the old tune. It was so much more uplifting than the material music of to-day. “*Mine and her soul rushed together.*” But alas! that was written a long time ago, as time counts in the whirl of the 20th century. It was almost archaic. To-day the poets must derive their inspiration from what is left of romance in the human heart after psycho-analysis is done with it. Horrible! All the disguises that covered love were being stripped away. Dante and Beatrice, Petrarch and Laura,

Paolo and Francesca ; could one ever thrill to the stories of these lovers again ? Life bids fair, he thought, in this 20th century to become simply a process—the sooner one is done with it the better.

And yet he had never been so far from wishing to be finished with it. Even the mere process of living was not so bad, especially for youth. And death ? Death might be worse than life. The process of dying anyhow could not be anything but unpleasant.

What an unexpected force he had struck in Gerald ! The man was permeated by a white heat of passion, so that he could see neither reason nor reality. He was unable to see that he was acting without consideration for the people with whom he was living. But perhaps that was only possible to one whose passions were lukewarm. Gerald was more in tune with life and its abominable processes. Sentiment, intellect, temperament, artistic feeling—these were antipathetic to Nature. Perhaps in time they will even come to be regarded as diseases, he thought, and the people who show signs of such insanities will be clapped into a lethal chamber before they can make much trouble for themselves and others.

As he could not sleep, he opened a writing-bureau which stood against the wall. Taking out an envelope, he addressed it to :

Miss Violet Higginson
17 Gingham Crescent
Regent's Park
London.

Then he wrote :

" Dear Violet,

' Thank you for your letter. I am a bad correspondent. I am even worse in other ways. But, if you can tolerate such a casual Kamarad, I will come and see you when I come back. (That is, *if* I ever do get back, for life here is so complicated by death.) You will see by the address where I am. You know something of the tropics.

With best wishes from your old and unworthy friend,

PATRICK."

He stamped the envelope. He owed Violet a letter and she should have it. He had forgotten Raymonde and the "bargain," which latter, to do him justice, he had never regarded

seriously, and he intended to forget Rose Harbury if . . .

To say that he was cured of his passion for her would not be strictly true. But he felt as though he had gone through thin ice into cold, deep water and been kept underneath the surface almost to drowning point. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

COOL OF THE MORNING

AFTER the storm and the rain the early sunrise shed an almost unearthly beauty over the hills and the green valleys of the Province. The trees and shrubs and the climbing indigo looked fresh and dewy after their bath of the night before. Outside the boundaries of the bungalow, on rising ground covered with trees, could be seen the tower of a Roman Catholic convent, built by the Portuguese settlers two hundred years before. It was surmounted by a crucifix, underneath which was a bell which still rang out the hours.

Inside the house Annabel and Rose drank tea together, in the room which the former called her den. A round table was covered with dishes of fruits and rolls and butter. The room was pleasant and on this cool morning it was almost

reminiscent of a room in an English country house. The panelled walls were painted white and adorned mostly with sporting pictures. There were two portraits painted in oil, and framed in gilt, of Jim Rendell's two cocker spaniels, champions both—Palmgrove Mack and Palmgrove Dicota. Rose had often sat at this table before in this room, but never alone with Annabel. She saw the pictures, noting them for the first time. Dicota seemed a long name for even one of the famous Palmgrove dogs.

"Why Dicota?" she asked carelessly.

"Dixie, really," replied Annabel, "but there's another Dixie in the field, so he had to be registered Dicota. Of course they can't live in this climate. Poor Dix and Mack, I expect they're pining no end for their master."

"It needs a *Man's* will to survive here," observed Rose.

Annabel made no reply to this remark. She considered her guest to be high falutin'; moreover she was rather cross with her for interfering, as she considered, with Patrick's chances. One hundred thousand pounds! and a beautiful girl into the bargain. What was the use of footling such prospects away with an airy flirtation accompanied by solemn conversations about

Christianity? Rose felt the coldness in Annabel's manner and she wondered if it had anything to do with suspicion about the jade necklace. She was reminded that she had forgotten to speak to Patrick about it after all that day in the pavilion. She decided to have it out about the necklace. A bright colour flooded her face. Her voice when she spoke had an unaccustomed note of appeal:

"Annabel!"

"Rose?"

At that moment Jim Rendell put his head inside the door. "Where is everybody, and where the devil are all the servants?" he asked irritably. "I've had to lace my own boots, and I can't find anything."

"Poor darling," said Annabel, "but the servants! I hope they haven't run away from the evil spirits the p^hawang says surround this bungalow."

The bell of the convent rang out the hour. Then . . . "Did you hear a shot?" asked Rose.

"That's nothing! Anybody might be shooting at anything in these parts. I always sleep with a revolver under my pillow when Jim's away and I'm left alone here."

The amah came breathlessly into the room. "Do not let them fire again," she begged.

"What? Where? Show me quick," said Jim.

He went hurtling out of the front door while the amah pointed and gesticulated, but she refused to accompany him.

"What does the girl say?" asked Rose, an uneasy feeling beginning to weigh on her heart.

"She says Gerald and Patrick intend to kill each other, if they haven't already done it," said Annabel, and the accusing note in her voice declared "this is your fault."

Rose burst into tears, for the second time in Prang, and for the second time in ten years.

"Dear me!" ejaculated the doctor, who joined them at this moment; but Annabel had followed her husband. The amah, with eyes full of hate, gazed at the Lady Harbury, wondering why she suffered when two men thought her worth fighting for. Truly Englishwomen were even more strange than their men folk, who were certainly mad to fight about such a woman. The doctor patted the lady's hand:

"What is it all about?" he asked kindly; "can I help?"

"Oh! come and see what has happened,"

cried Rose, and she put her hand through the doctor's arm. They both ran across the lawn in the direction of the voices of Annabel and Jim.

"What on earth!" gasped the doctor, when they came to the grass plot behind the pavilion.

"It's only Gerald, he's gone dotty," Annabel assured them, "it's all right, lots of Englishmen go queer when they come out East."

Gerald stood with folded arm and clenched teeth, the picture of wrath heated to freezing-point. He had thrown his revolver on the ground. Patrick leaned against the wall of the pavilion. He held his revolver limply, and he had the appearance of one who has given up trying to solve any sort of conundrum. Rose breathed a sigh of relief. They were alive anyhow. . . .

"Take his revolver away," she cried. She meant Patrick's weapon, but her husband turned on her like a wild thing of the jungle. "Did *you* change my ammunition?" he asked savagely.

"A lot of nonsense," muttered Jim.

Poor Rose shivered and turned away her face. "Tell him I didn't," she whispered to the doctor. But the doctor was bereft of speech.

"I've got no blanks," Gerald rapped.

"But *I* have," said Annabel.

"Did you do it?"

"I should have done it if I had known you were going to play this fool's game," replied Annabel with rising wrath, "but as I *didn't* know it . . . and don't you look murder at me, Gerald, or you'll have Jim to reckon with."

"Now, now, now," said Jim, "leave it to me, Annabel. If it were blank ammunition you were practising with, who fired the shot?"

"I did," said Patrick.

"And he had the damn cheek to fire in the air," said Gerald.

"Well, it seems to me," said Jim, "that you're quits all right now. Of course I don't know what your quarrel is . . ."

Annabel looked at Rose.

"Nothing of the sort," said Gerald, catching the look.

"What I was going to tell you was," said Jim, "that I won't have this sort of thing going on in my grounds. If you must fight . . ."

"Oh, we'll have it out all right," snapped Gerald.

"But not here."

"Nor to-day either," said Annabel, knowing

that to-morrow never comes. "I won't have my dance spoiled. Jim, tell them not to spoil my dance."

Jim picked up Gerald's revolver and looked at the blank cartridges which were left.

"You'll have to clear yourself, Annabel," he said.

"Rot," said Annabel. "I haven't looked at my blanks since I helped to train Dixie with them at home."

"How odd," murmured Rose, "that I noticed Dixie for the first time this morning."

"Dixie!" echoed the flabbergasted doctor. "Oh! the dog!"

"This fooling must stop," said Jim. "You must both give me your parole, or I'll have to resort to . . . Come, be reasonable. I'm in a hurry. I want my tea."

Rose looked commiseratingly at Patrick. "So do some others," she said.

"Let us all return to the house," suggested the doctor. "Patrick, give me your revolver."

"You won't get off," muttered Gerald to his antagonist.

"I'm ashamed of you," said Annabel, overhearing him.

"The point is," said Jim, "that we *must* find

out who exchanged the cartridges, and why, whoever did it, only tampered with one. I don't like these things going on in my house, and I won't have it either. If it was one of the servants, Haji . . . I'll push his face through the back of his neck."

"Jim darling," soothed Annabel, "don't get murderous too; it couldn't be Haji. Besides anyone would think you wanted the shooting to take place in real earnest."

"She has hit the mark," murmured the psychoanalyst.

"No—no, but the point is . . . " began Jim.

"Do let us go and have tea," persuaded his brother, "we shall find out just as easily indoors who prevented—I mean, committed this crime, as here."

"The only one who knew I had the blank cartridges," said Annabel, "is the amah, because I made her put them in another drawer so as not to confuse them with the real ones the last time you went away, Jim."

"Ah ha!" said her husband, "I always knew that girl was up to no good; I told her I was on the track of her wickedness." And he began to move towards the house. They all followed.

Rose felt as though her heart was turned to lead. It was all her fault of course. She was glad that nothing had happened. At the same time her heart ached for her husband, whose tragedy had been made farcical.

Ching, the house-boy, answered the summons of his mistress. "Boy!" commanded Annabel, bring the amah here at once."

Nothing loth, Ching went in search of her, and presently returned, followed by the Malay girl, who looked half frightened and half defiant.

"Girl," said her master, "why did you tamper with his honour Harbury's revolver, and how dare you go into his room anyhow?"

The Malay girl looked on the ground.

"She does not deny it," said Rose.

"Answer me."

The girl shrugged and began to look hardened, and insolent.

"Oh, Jim, don't . . . my dance . . . she'll run away," begged Annabel.

"Why?"

"He would have killed . . ." The girl looked at Patrick Logan with a look so unutterably and hideously tender that no one could mistake its meaning.

"Well, I'm . . ." Jim found himself bereft for once of exclamation.

"You see," said Gerald.

"Dirty dog," said Annabel.

"Oh, Annabel, how can you?" said Rose.

"How can you believe anything so perfectly ridiculous?"

Gerald glared at her.

"Dear friend," said Patrick to Rose, "I implore you not to worry about me. It doesn't matter what anyone believes or doesn't believe. I shall leave this place to-day."

"And I'll follow you," said Gerald.

"Gerald, how can you?"

"You don't understand."

"You shan't do anything of the sort. I won't have my dance spoiled," cried Annabel, who was now on the verge of tears, "and if you both go . . ."

"And I won't have Annabel upset," declared Jim Rendell, fiercely. "Look here, Patrick, what business have you to come here fooling about like this; first of all with . . ."

"Now then," interrupted Gerald in a tone so menacing that Jim was infuriated.

"Who d'you think you're talking to?" he asked, "you'd better come and have a knock about with me."

"Thank God, I've got the loaded revolver," said the doctor.

Annabel by this time had thrown her arms round her husband's neck. "Jim, darling," she begged, "don't spoil Annabel's dance . . . poor Annabel . . . darling Jim."

Jim kissed her, and tried to get away from her encircling arms. "Poor Annabel, indeed, it is hard lines to have such guests."

"Now you're making it worse," she said, holding him tighter.

"Really, Gerald, you see the sort of insult you've laid me open to," said Rose.

"What's the matter now?" asked Gerald, sulkily.

His wife sighed. The remark and the tone of it were almost normal.

"Come, come" expostulated the doctor, "let us all be reasonable. Let us all have tea."

Ching, the house-boy, held forth in the compound. Never had he had so attentive an audience. He swelled with importance. The amah contradicted everything he said, with suitable words fitting the description of a pariah dog.

"All women are without reason," said the boy.

"What has she done? Instead of a fight and the death of one foreign devil, there is no fight, nothing but a quarrel among all of them. And what good does this do her, I ask you? Is it that she 'loves the young man 'beautiful as a Malay'? Then she leaves the shot in *his* revolver so that he can shoot the man, the husband of the female devil whom he loves. What then? He kills the man . . ."

"But he did not," shrieked the amah.

"He might have done, and what then? He marries the female devil, her husband being dead."

The amah had not thought of this.

"There is wisdom in what the young infidel says," declared the chorus.

"But there is no wisdom in it," shrieked the Malay girl, "for, if the young man had murdered the husband, he would have been . . . hanged in Singapore, so he could not marry her."

"I do not believe he would have been hanged in Singapore," said the butler. "I have never heard of an Englishman being hanged there. I do not think Englishmen are hanged anywhere."

"They are," said the cook, "for I have seen a picture of one in a paper."

An electric bell rang.

"Hurry, boy!" commanded the amah.

But, before he hurried, Ching, with his face close to hers, whispered, "You, with your petty tricks, what have you accomplished? But *I*? What shall I accomplish? We will see."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MARKET PLACE

GERALD and Rose stared at each other across the table in Annabel's den. Rose was dressed for the morning ride, but Annabel was busy with preparations for her dance which Fate had so nearly spoiled. Jim Rendell had carried off Patrick in his car. The doctor had taken possession of the pavilion. Rose had an uncomfortable feeling that the man sitting in the chair opposite to her was a stranger, that he was not the Gerald, well-groomed and monocled, nonchalant and laconic, whom she had known for six years. It is true that for five years out of those six the war had absorbed him—she remembered that he had even got a medal, a D.S.O., which he chose to forget. "We were all sort of terrified that one of us would get the D.S.O., or something," he had once said, "and, of course, it must needs be me."

Garbed only in a pair of white trousers and a silk shirt, he felt at a disadvantage. Nervously searching for his monocle, and finding it not there, he put his hands in his pockets and began to hum.

"You always make one feel in the wrong," he said, presently.

"I have not said anything . . . but oh! Gerald, I do think . . . the boy is so young . . ."

"That increases his offence."

"How so?"

"Impertinence."

"Does one punish impertinence with death?"

"Not a bad notion, and there hasn't been any death—yet."

"Oh, Gerald! How can you? I had no idea you were so callous!—but . . ."

"Of course," he said, "you *would* stick up for him. I can't think what's come over you." He scanned her as though he expected to find some answer to the riddle in her appearance. "You're not quite old enough yet to like them young," he commented.

"Gerald," said his wife, angrily, "I detest you."

"I know you do, and I . . ." he reflected a moment, then, springing up from his chair, he

caught hold of her by the shoulders and shook her—hard.

“Brute!”

Rose dropped into a chair, and Gerald bolted from the room. She really felt giddy and queer, and wondered if her brains or her heart or something inside had not been shaken out of place. But she recovered presently, and, although she tried to realise his brutality, she found herself smiling with a sense of unwonted satisfaction, even as a savage might smile when the mighty hunter knocks out her front teeth in order to show his affection. Then she realised her own acquiescence, her lapse into the primitive—she who had walked on a high plane, hand in hand with neo-platonism!

Rose picked a flower from a trailing plant on the veranda. She pulled it to pieces. “He loves me, he loves me not; he loves me *not*.” Silly superstition! But it left an unpleasant suggestion of insecurity in her mind. For who knows . . .

Some Puck-like spirit of perversity suggested to her that, the morning ride having failed, she should hire a rickshaw and go into the town. No one could accuse her of running after Patrick, for he was under the wing of Jim Rendell.

“Will you get me a rickshaw?” she said

sweetly to Ching, the house-boy, whom she discovered in the lounge, sitting on the front step of a flight which led up to a small gallery, where the band would play that evening, "you don't seem to be too busy."

The Chinese boy looked up at her with unwinking, expressionless eyes. He shook his head.

"No time?" asked Rose, "rickshaw?" He understood this word, and, nodding his head, hurried away.

Very soon, dressed in a suit of Shantung silk and a gauze-swathed shady hat, and with her large turquoise ear-rings in her ears, Rose was at the front door, ready to start.

"You look pale; sorry I can't come with you," said Annabel, "have a drink before you go."

"Yes, thank you, dear."

"By the way," said Annabel, "you're keen on antiques. You might find something in the market place for a small sum. I once got a jade bracelet there for eight dollars."

"Jade," said Rose, "jade doesn't suit me, and you remind me—that necklace! I said it was mine, because the amah knew quite well it was not mine. She thought—well, it seems silly, but she thought she would make me jealous if I thought—oh, really, I can't explain."

"I understand perfectly," said Annabel, "especially now that girl has told us about Patrick. Oh! don't say it's all her fault, it never is, don't you believe it. That's what's the matter with you, Rose, you don't understand men. *They're all alike*—in some ways. But what has become of the necklace? What did you do with it?"

"I can't remember. I must have left it on the seat where I was. . . . Have you found your cigarette case?"

"I have not," said Annabel.

"Well!" sighed Rose, "here is my rickshaw. . . . Au revoir, dear."

She got into the rickshaw with the pleasant feeling of having cleared up an unpleasant and mysterious affair. But, after all, where *was* the necklace? Where was the cigarette case?

The road, as it neared the town of Prang, was traversed by a ceaseless traffic of carts, motors and rickshaws. The heat and the dust were terrific, and there were all sorts of pungent smells, some of them pleasant, but most of them quite otherwise. Rose Harbury had never been that way alone before, and neither the scenery nor the people had therefore claimed her undivided attention. Now she looked at the view, at the sea, at the green grass and the tall palm trees,

at the buildings blazing white in the sun, and felt that odd sense of awareness which many people feel in the East, and the strange thrilled sense of having seen it all before. Incommunicable feelings such as these she liked to discuss with Patrick. He understood. Gerald, of course, would laugh at her—at least she supposed he would laugh, for she had never talked to him in that vein. She wondered if she had taken him too much for granted. When she thought like this, she was able to absolve herself from too much blame in regard to Patrick, for their friendship had begun in such a harmless manner. It had been rooted and nurtured by the spell of the East, not impossibly by the tie of some former incarnation. She was a romantic. Patrick was a romantic. Gerald? well, he was just a man. Once more she smiled to herself, remembering how he had shaken her that morning.

In the streets and in the market place of Prang all sorts of men jostled each other. Black men and brown men, white men and yellow men. There were mandarins and coolies, Malays, Indians, Englishmen—every sort of man. And they all hurried—more or less. They were all about some business.

Rose had started rather late for her rickshaw

ride and the sun was rising towards the meridian, making the heat intolerable. But the market buzzed with the vendors of every sort of merchandise. It also buzzed with flies and insects that stung. There was a Babel of strange tongues. A group of turbaned Indian jugglers with a paraphernalia of baskets and cloths squatted on the ground. Rose wished she were not alone, so that she might ask them to perform one of their famous tricks for her. In spite of the fact that her face was now uncomfortably flushed with the heat and that her throat was parched and her body bathed in perspiration, she felt unable to leave the market place. It typified the East to which surely she belonged ; the spell of the East was in her blood. Gerald had said, " I can't think what has come over you." But it was just—the spell of the East. She wondered if he would understand if she told him that. Even Annabel had said that lots of Englishmen went " queer, out East," and Annabel was not given to vain imaginings. Annabel typified an almost excessive sanity like . . . she had thought of comparing Gerald with Annabel, but she recollected that the affair of the revolver duel hardly indicated excessive sanity. Possibly—he, too, might be reckoned among the romantics.

Rose looked wistfully at the things on the stalls. She loved *things* so much, and she had so little money. Here were Chinese embroideries, carved ivories from Japan, silver of Perak, metal-work, sarongs, and silks galore. And there were jewels and ear-rings. A Malay with a bare body and wearing white trousers, but crowned with an old black bowler hat, said "Sixpence, sixpence" to attract her attention. This, unfortunately, was the only English word he had, but he showed her some nice jewels. Rose shook her head. Presently, rolling his eyes, he produced from a hidden place under the stall a long green jade necklace. It was beautiful. There are several kinds of jade, especially of the green variety, but this was perfect, translucent, a necklace fit for a princess of the Middle Kingdom. Rose stared at it. Could there be two such necklaces in Prang? She decided there could not.

"How much?" she asked.

The Malay poured forth a torrent of words. And then a well-known voice spoke behind her, "Rose!"

She turned and saw no other than Patrick. "Could there be another necklace like that?" she began, but the Malay seeming to sense the detection of "stolen goods" whipped away the necklace with miraculous speed.

"Raymonde's necklace," whispered Rose, "how shall we make him give it up?"

"I'll fetch Jim," said Patrick, "I left him in the car with my prospective father-in-law, they're fixing it all up."

"But how *can* you, Patrick, if you don't love her. . . ."

"I shall never love anyone"—he looked intensely at her.

Who could resist such subtle flattery, implied not said? "I am so sorry," faltered Rose, "about everything."

"It's quite all right, if I'm allowed to live."

"That nonsense is finished," she said, "you and—he are both *en parole*; by to-morrow you'll both see things differently."

"Both see things differently! Ye gods!" ejaculated Patrick.

"There is no reason," she broke in hurriedly, "why we should not be friends, is there?"

"None, as far as I am concerned." He spoke coldly. Suddenly she saw quite clearly that they had never been friends; not *friends*.

"Will you fetch Jim," she asked. "Meanwhile I will bargain for something for a few dollars as well as I can with someone who doesn't understand a word I say"

Rose picked up a pair of filigree gold ear-rings. They were light, although they were large, and ring-shaped, and in the centre of each was suspended an exquisitely carved Chinese junk, which shook and tinkled with every movement. She placed the ear-rings against her ears, and studied their effect with the aid of a somewhat dilapidated bit of mirror at the back of the stall. They suited her. All Eastern things suited her. She offered the man five dollars. With many nods and ingratiating smiles he accepted the price tendered. "I suppose I could have had them for two," thought Rose.

At this moment Jim Rendell appeared with Patrick. The Malay started and was about to run, but the formidable planter prevented him. There followed a storm of dialogue. Finally the man unearthed the jade necklace.

"He'll let me have it for thirty dollars," said Jim, "so, of course, it's stolen. He says he bought it from an Indian; gave him twenty-five for it, and how am I to prove that he didn't? In any case, it's very fine jade. I'm a purchaser. If it turns out to be other than Raymonde's, you would like it, Lady Harbury?"

"No, no. I don't like jade; I suggest you give it to Annabel. But, of course, it's Ray-

monde's necklace ; why else, when he could get 200, or more, for it, would the man sell it you for thirty dollars ? ”

“ Search me ! ” said Jim, “ I don't know. But you oughtn't to be out, Lady Harbury, at this hour of the day. I've sent the car home, too, . . . No, a rickshaw's too hot and too slow now, and there'll be an awful buzz about that dance. I'll tell you what, let us lunch at Nicolson's, and I'll 'phone to the garage out here for a car afterwards.”

“ I think it would be lovely,” said Rose. “ I'm really awfully hot and tired.”

Only Patrick looked anxious. He perceived that eventually he and Rose would return together. What then ! he sighed, but made no remark..

So the three lunched on the most *recherché* dishes Nicolson's chef provided. Best of all, they drank Barsac iced, and afterwards Pommery. Life assumed a pleasanter aspect ; all the shocks and horrors of the morning dwindled away.

“ Here's luck, Lady Harbury,” said Jim, “ and I hope you've forgiven me for being rude to you this morning.”

“ Were you rude ? ” she asked sweetly. “ I think we were all a bit mad this morning.”

A brown boy, scantily dressed, brought Rendell a chit.

"I can't come back with you," announced the planter. "Here's an unexpected summons for me. Is it safe to let you two travel alone?"

Patrick looked serious, but Rose laughed happily. Such is the influence of Barsac and Pommery '05—to say nothing of the Spell of the East. "Needs must, I suppose," said the young man gloomily.

"This is the last time, Patrick," said Rose to him as they got into the car.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't even know—but I have a sort of clairvoyant sense about things to-day. I wanted to tell you about what I felt coming along alone in the rickshaw. About having lived before and all that. It seemed so wonderful when I thought it; now it is gone. Everything will be different after this. I wonder what is the matter with me. Perhaps it is just physical. I didn't sleep last night after that awful storm. Then there was the morning—then I was too hot—then Barsac and Pommery. No wonder I am clairvoyant."

Purposely she made her speech grow into a crescendo of flippancy. It was necessary to match the mood of the young man beside her. He was

not flippant, but he was no longer sympathetic. He was remote, detached. Perhaps she did not make enough allowance for the fact that he had had to face a revolver aimed against his heart in the morning. And Gerald was a dead shot. She shuddered.

They sat out the rest of the drive in silence. As they came to the front door, she looked round to see that no one was about. She omitted to look up to the veranda, where Gerald was sitting reading a newspaper upside down. He gave one swift furious glance at them.

"That puts the lid on," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

TEA

ROSE touched her husband ever so lightly on the shoulder. He was sitting with his back to her on the veranda, and she wondered if he had seen her get out of the car with Patrick. But of course he had seen her. . . . He stood up with formal politeness and an enquiring air—he who had shaken her earlier in the day. His attitude dried up her tongue, but she forced it into speech.

“We have found Raymonde’s jade necklace,” she said.

“I am glad,” he replied coldly, without asking for further details.

They stood there awkwardly for a few moments. Even as Gerald had wished for a monsoon, a tornado, a tidal wave, an earthquake, anything, to blow up the ruts in which they walked, so did his wife now wish that something like that might happen. Once more she looked at his face as one who sees it for the first time. He had an implacable mouth. It seemed as though they

had both travelled far since the day when she had dominated him, even since the day when he had compared her to a star, and she realised that she had held him by a moral force ; not her own moral force, because her morals, so far, had been the result of pride and taste—in a word, temptation had not tempted her. But Gerald persisted in regarding her as a queen who could do no wrong. She wished she had not admitted she had kissed Patrick Logan ; still more, she wished she had never kissed him. But queens can make mistakes—and be forgiven ? That is just it, she thought, one loses if one is forgiven. She went slowly back into her bedroom, and her husband said not a detaining word.

Looking out at the view, as she had gazed on the first day of her arrival in Prang, Rose marvelled to find it just as glamorous, beautiful, brilliant blue and emerald green as ever, and it looked peaceful, but what did it hide ? The jungle with its creatures “ red of tooth and claw.” The whole world was a jungle. All the arts and philosophies only served to hide its murderousness, even as the pleasant palms and bamboo trees and bright-coloured flora hid poisonous snakes and mosquitoes and all the warring species. The bell of the convent rang out the hour ;

it was four o'clock. Above the surrounding trees the spire surmounted by a cross was clearly defined against the sky. . . .

The Chinese boy strolled across the compound carrying a silver tray. Under the thatched roof of the wooden balcony in the servants' quarters the pâwang squatted, smoking a pipe. The amah and the butler both leaned against the balcony drinking cups of tea and listening to the old man's news, which he imparted between the whiffs of smoke.

"Two jade necklaces," he said.

"And which is the real one?"

"They gave me no opportunity of seeing them both together."

"Perhaps neither of them is real."

"That may well be," said the pâwang.

The Chinese cook, who, although he was busy in his kitchen, was within earshot of their voices, called out at this point in the conversation. "It may well be," he mimicked, "that my people will not allow their most beautiful jade to go out of our country into the possession of foreign devils! They are so clever—these foreign devils!" and he chuckled fiendishly.

"I will communicate your remarks to Rendell," said Haji, who joined them at that moment.

"You may do so," retorted the cook. "It will avail nothing. There are many butlers and house-boys and personal servants—they can be found begging in the market place; but cooks, no! I am a cook."

There was no gainsaying this. A cook is a very important person. And a Chinese cook, as a rule, reaches perfection in the art. Haji for once was worsted. He turned to the p^hwang.

"I hear you have obtained a reward for finding the jade necklace," he said. "Where did you find it?"

"The reward I got from the Lady Mallaby," returned the p^hwang calmly; "by my arts I found the necklace."

"Arts," said the house-boy, "have you murdered the magician?"

The p^hwang looked up at the house-boy. "That boy is mad," he said; "he tarries on his errands, why do you not hasten with your tray?"

"The woman Harbury wants tea," said the boy. "She wants it in her own room, although there is tea in the small dining-room. All the others drink it there."

"Boy," said the cook, "why do you not hurry and give the woman her tea? You will get into trouble."

"She seemed to be dying," said the boy, "her face was white, her eyes were closed, she breathed like this," and he imitated what may have been deep sighs; "she rang the bell and said one word, tea. But, if she is dying, why does she want tea?"

"She is faint," returned the amah, "she deserves to faint."

"What has she done to you," asked Haji.

"The woman is beautiful," laughed the butler.

"Beautiful!" shrieked the amah, "beautiful!"

"Not so beautiful as you are, of course."

"Is the Malay girl beautiful?" grinned the house-boy, still brandishing his tray. "Can such a black face be beautiful, such a wide nose, such thick lips? Ha, ha!"

"Your face is the face of a devil," said the insulted amah, "it is yellow, your eyes are slit upwards, and you have no hair to boast of—pariah dog!"

"My children," begged the p^hwang, "do not quarrel. Listen, to-night I entice the evil spirits from this house. I have permission. The wife of Rendell gave me permission. She also gave me money. When the music plays I have leave to begin my incantations—they will not be heard then by the infidel Rendell."

"Whom you call 'my father' to his face, old hypocrite," said the cook.

The pâwang looked evilly at the cook, but it was necessary not to offend him, so he spoke in an ingratiating voice: "I shall need many dishes of rice for the spirits," he said.

"How many spirits are there?" asked the cook.

"There are two bad ones, but there are always others who are neither good nor bad, but who are dominated by the bad ones."

"So that you entice the two away it seems to me the others will not matter," said the cook; "in any case they can eat out of one dish. I will give you three dishes of rice, I cannot spare any more."

"Very well," agreed the old man, "but they must drink wine."

"Surely it is waste of good wine to give it to spirits," objected the butler and Haji with one voice.

"They are the sort of spirits who would be glad to drink blood," said the pâwang, "but, if I allowed that, I should not answer for the consequences." He looked at the Chinese boy. "Young blood is what they desire," he said.

Ching winced, but he replied insolently, "You

can have the blood of the young man 'beautiful as a Malay.' "

"Of whom do you speak?" asked Haji.

"Did I not tell you," demanded the amah, "that he was a murderous young devil? Did I not say so, and you who are men stand there and do not chastise him."

"What is the use. We are forbidden," grumbled the butler, and after all the boy has not offended *us*."

"Men!" shrieked the amah in derision. "Men!" She ran across the compound and returned with a whip, which she had obtained from one of the grooms. Before the house-boy—who by this time had received from the cook a teapot filled with China tea, a cup and saucer, and a jug of milk on his tray—before he could escape, she had cut him across the legs so that he jumped in the air and the porcelain went flying. The boy, with a howl of pain and rage, aimed the silver tray at the Malay girl's head. It hit her in the eye with such force that she dropped the whip. At that moment several bells rang.

"The front door bell," said the butler, "the small dining-room bell, the woman Harbury's bell. How can *I* answer all these?"

The amah answered the small dining-room bell.

"What is the matter?" said her mistress, noticing the grazed eye. "You'll have a black eye to-morrow."

"I bumped into the infi—the house-boy while he was carrying a tea-tray to the Lady Harbury who is fainting," explained the girl.

This had the desired effect of distracting attention from herself. Annabel looked at Gerald, who was the only other occupant of the room. He glanced up quickly at the mention of his wife, but sullenly set his teeth again, as it were. "After all," he argued, "women *do* faint. They often do it, especially in hot weather."

"You really are——" a brute Annabel was going to say, but she hurried away to see her friend instead. In the hall she ran against a visitor. It was Raymonde.

"I came to tell you about my necklace," she began, but Annabel cut her short. "Go into the morning-room and have tea, dear," and hurried into Rose's room.

Rose, who by this time had swallowed some strong China tea, was feeling better.

"I've had rather a strenuous day," she admitted, "I *was* feeling rather low. Four o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon one's temperature is at its lowest, isn't it? Hence tea. Is Gerald about?"

"He's in the morning-room," said Annabel. "Raymonde has just come."

Rose's face clouded. After all, thought her friend, he *is* her husband, though she seems to have forgotten it lately. But the cloud passed, Rose stood up. "I wonder what I shall wear to-night," she speculated.

"You'll look lovely, whatever it is," declared Annabel, generously. "I'm going to wear white silk net filmed over jade-green silk, made in dozens of points each ending in jade beads, and look——" She showed the necklace Rose had found in the market place. "Raymonde has got hers. Mysterious, isn't it? The old pâwang found it—for a reward." She giggled, "He's no end of an old devil, but I've given him money—don't tell Jim, he'd slay me—I've given him money to entice the evil spirits away who've been bothering us all this time. Don't you think there *may* be evil spirits, Rose?"

"I don't think there are many others than evil," sighed Rose.

"Oh, well, I shouldn't take such a gloomy view of it as all that," said her friend, "everything will come all right; but, Rose——"

"Annabel?"

"Don't . . . you won't mind what I say? Don't flirt *seriously*."

"Flirt!" gasped Rose, "but I never . . . You don't really associate that word with me, do you, Annabel? I . . ."

"Well, don't take on about it. There you are again, dead serious. Gerald's rather serious too. He's got the devil in him."

"Perhaps Raymonde will help to get it out," said Rose, bitterly.

"Will she? I must go and look after them. Things are just beginning to be all right, I can't have any more tragedies cropping up *before* the dance."

Rose laughed.

"By the way, where is Patrick?" asked Annabel, pausing at the door.

"Don't ask me," said Rose, shortly.

Annabel departed, and Rose surveyed her face in the glass. It bore traces of her recent suffering, but it was not marred thereby. There were no painful lines or creases; she had a nice skin, a tight skin which suffers no ravages from powder or rouge and looks well even in a side-light. Personally, she rather liked her face. There are many, of course, who will give youth the palm for beauty, but is the merely physical, the *beauté du diable*, the face which has not yet gained character through suffering and experience, is it really the most beautiful?

Rose was young enough, and she was really beautiful, but hers was not the first physical flush of radiant youth. It was not *beauté du diable*. Nevertheless, it had charmed Patrick, and Gerald had compared her to a star. . . .

She looked at her dresses. Gold suited her. Gold lace over a pale yellow foundation. She put out a diamond star. She would not compete with the very young, not even with Annabel in her films of gauzy white and jade.

Raymonde's car had not yet carried her away. Was she talking to Gerald all this time? Or had she found Patrick? Rose knew intuitively that if she had found Patrick she would have started to return in the car. Annabel was busy. Therefore she was talking to Gerald. . . .

CHAPTER XX

EVE

GERALD greeted Raymonde with his usual "Hallo, old sport," and Raymonde returned, "What ho ! "

"Are you all here to-day, or part of you, or what ? " grinned Gerald.

"I'm always all there if that's what you mean, but what about everything ? I wish you'd advise me."

Dressed completely in white, Raymonde looked absurdly young—about fifteen ; she had also an air of most disarming innocence, and to boot she was pretty, and had glorious hair.

"If you were me," said Raymonde, slowly, "would you marry that milksop ? "

"Milksop ? Oh ! Patrick Logan." Gerald's face clouded. In his opinion Patrick was convicted of the impertinence of making love to a lady whose hand he was unworthy to kiss, also of the dirty trick of amusing himself with a

Malay girl, who was a servant in the house of his host. But his code forbade him to say so to Raymonde. So he said nothing. But, studying the expression on his face, she came to the conclusion that he was "dead jealous," which pleased her. For she admired him immensely. He was good-looking, and he had a manner which was new to her. The young planters whom she met were not always gifted with *savoir-faire*. Harry, who had mysteriously vanished from her ken, and about whom her father was oddly reticent, had been quite a gallant young man; he was about twenty-eight years old, and therefore not reminiscent of the schoolroom. Like many young girls, nothing more completely failed to capture Raymonde's imagination than the unfinished appearance of youth. Boys who had spotted faces and looked as though they were still growing (though they might have reached the advanced ago of twenty or thereabouts), or had incipient down instead of a full-grown moustache (however clipped or shaven)—such as these were anathema to the girl. She liked something sophisticated, experienced. To say that Raymonde was in love with Harry and heart-broken because of his disappearance would be a misstatement. But she was exasperated at not being able to leave the

home she had grown to hate. Since his disappearance she had become reckless. All the repressed exuberances of her childhood had risen up to her consciousness in the form of a desire to outrage the conventions. She longed for an adventure.

"Would you marry him, if you were me?"

It is flattering to have a young and pretty girl hanging on your words as though they mattered so immensely. And Gerald had been made to feel lately as though nothing he said or did mattered at all. He had no idea what to say. He polished his monocle.

"Do you . . . as it were . . . care about him?"

"Oh, no," replied Raymonde, "I love *you*."

"Now, really, you know," said Rose's husband, smiling in spite of himself . . .

"One doesn't do these things, I suppose," suggested the girl.

At this juncture Annabel came into the room. "Having an interesting talk?" she asked, looking at them, curiously.

"Not particularly," Raymonde answered her, "what I really came to tell you was—only you were in such a hurry and wouldn't stop to listen—that I've found my necklace. At least the old

pâwang found it. He won't give away where."

"It wasn't here, anyhow," said Annabel.

The girl was silent.

"Raymonde," said Annabel, "why are you silent; do you dare to suggest anyone here had it?"

"No, oh no; keep smiling, Annabel."

"It's not easy with all the things that happen . . . however, hadn't you better get off, dear, if you're coming to my dance to-night?"

"No hurry," said Raymonde, coolly. "I'll help you hang up some Chinese lanterns like you had for your last dance in the garden."

"Not in the garden, there'll be a moon, but in the portico, if you like."

So Gerald and Raymonde continued their conversation in the portico.

"He wouldn't be my taste if I was a gal," said Gerald.

"Yes, but you're not. The question is, shall I or shan't I?"

"I'm the very last person you ought to ask—if you only knew," said Gerald. "Besides, supposing someone shot him?"

"Why?"

"Oh, just for being there. Some people do annoy one."

"How splendid of you," said the girl; to think of your caring for me as much as all that and not showing it! I love you for it. But—you mustn't do it. I'd rather sacrifice myself. You'd be tried for murder."

"Gosh!" muttered Gerald, "I am putting my feet into it."

"What's that?" asked the girl. She came close to him. She laid a little light pink hand on his arm. He patted the hand.

"Pretty," he said.

Raymonde clasped his arm with the other hand. Gerald suddenly cooled. No one knew better than he that kissing without loving is easy enough, and not very interesting unless there is a special taboo on it. In this case? Well? Well! the choice lay with him, only . . . one doesn't do these things. He disengaged his arm.

"There's no one coming," Raymonde assured him. Gerald put his hands behind his back and pushed out his chin.

"What shall we do?" the girl asked.

"Do?" said Gerald, "my dear child, what have you got into your head? I'm twice your age; how old are you? Eighteen, and I'm thirty-six, and married and all. What would you?"

"D'you like being married?" asked Raymonde, curiously.

This was a poser. And it brought all his troubles back to the husband of Rose. He still had an account to settle with that—that milksop. And Rose had told him earlier in the day that she detested him. And yet—there had been a look on her face when she spoke to him on the veranda. . . . But how dared she stay out to lunch and come home in a car with Patrick Logan after all that had happened? As he had said when he saw them, it "put the lid on." He would exact penance from somebody for it. Raymonde, seeing that a painful struggle was going on in his mind, once more put her hand through his arm, and caressingly and consolingly rubbed her cheek against it in the manner of a purring cat. Rose came out into the portico at this moment, and quickly retreated.

"Your wife's seen you," said Raymonde.

"Where? When?" he started, and looked round.

"What a blue funk you're in! Are you afraid of her?"

"I'm not afraid of her."

"What are you afraid of then?"

Gerald reflected. "I'm afraid of losing something," he said.

Raymonde had to be content with that. He put her into her car, and she was driven away.

Gerald rushed upstairs and knocked loudly on his wife's door.

"Is the house on fire?" she asked coldly.

"Do you want me to shake you again?" asked her husband, "because I will. I'm in the mood."

"I had no idea you concealed so much violence, Gerald."

"Well, now you know. Answer my questions." He followed her as she retreated into the room. "Why did you go out with that milksop this morning, and stay out to lunch, too?"

"I didn't. I went alone, and I met him and Jim. It was Jim who made us stay to lunch in Nicolson's, and he would have come home with us only a boy brought him a chit. You can ask Jim."

"I've asked *you*," said Gerald, in a mollified tone, "that's enough for me. Tell me one thing more. Do you care for that young man?"

"I do not."

"Why did you kiss him then?"

"Why did *you* kiss Raymonde?"

I didn't—at least not that time, and the other

time—the time you know—she honoured me with a visit on my veranda. Well, Rose, I ask you, what can a chap sort of kind of do? When a girl throws her arm round his neck he can't push her away and say, 'Get off you brute.' "

"Doesn't the same argument apply to me?"

"Certainly not. I won't have you kissing people."

"I'll promise never to do it again."

"That's enough for me. Now one more question. Do you detest me?"

"No, of course not."

"*That* isn't enough, but still . . ." He surveyed her. She had donned her gold lace dress. She looked exceptionally handsome.

"I'll make you love me," he said.

"I wish you would," said his wife, but when he came towards her she eluded him. He folded his arms and stood regarding her ruefully.

"You play fast and loose," he accused her.

"I don't play at all," she protested, "but the sudden shocks I've had to-day have been too much for me. I hope there are not more to come."

"Rely on me," said Gerald. "So long."

"Things," said Rose to herself, "are beginning to be normal again. She said this in the tone of one who desires to be assured of something

which she knows is not quite true. On this particular evening her intuition told her that things do not so suddenly run smooth again when one has set them wrong.

On her way to the lounge she was intercepted by the amah. The girl broke into voluble speech, not a word of which could the lady understand. She shook her head.

"Kill," said the amah, "kill."

"Who?" asked Rose.

The amah pointed in the direction of Patrick Logan's room.

"He didn't do it," said Rose, thinking she referred to the morning. The amah shook her head. Rose went to the door of the room and knocked.

"Come in," she heard him say.

"It's all right, you see," she said reassuringly to the Malay girl.

The amah went into the compound and expatiated at length on the stupidity of English-women.

"I think you speak with prejudice," said the butler.

With an expression of disgust the girl left him and tiptoed towards the bedroom of her admirer, Ching. But by ill-chance he was there.

"Ha! spy," he said, catching hold of her "so you visit me in my room, black face. You love me well!" He put his arm round her waist and dragged her round the room with him in a sort of bunny-hug.

"Even so the foreign devils dance," he cried.

The amah kicked and spat.

"You love me well," said Ching.

"You will hang yet," said the amah, "and I will give evidence against you."

At that moment the bell of the convent rang out the hour. "Listen," said Ching, "the people who cause that bell to ring, they have a Mission. To their Mission I will go if I am suspected of anything. I become Christian. They will protect me."

CHAPTER XXI

EVIL SPIRITS

"THREE dishes of rice are unworthy of this dwelling," complained the pâwang.

"Cease to bother me," said the Chinese cook, "I am exceptionally busy. Besides, it is not yet time to entice away your spirits. The music which is to drown the noise you make is not yet begun."

"Boy," said the pâwang to Ching, "will you get me some wine?"

"Presently," said Ching. "I too am busy."

Ching was busy with his own troubles. He was worried as to how he was to convey the magician's box into the room of the young man "beautiful as a Malay," without being seen doing it. He had suspected and now he knew what the box contained for he had bored a tiny hole in it and seen the creature moving inside. A snake it was, a

snake which would bite the young man "beautiful as a Malay" and kill him. He had given a gold cigarette case for the snake, to say nothing of a jade necklace. Well! he had not exactly given the latter, for he had sold the jade necklace for twenty-five dollars to a villain of his acquaintance, who had given him in return for it (added to the twenty-five dollars) an imitation necklace, which he had in his turn given to the p^âwang, and his associate who had quickly discovered the worthlessness of the beads, and for this reason had returned them to Mrs. Mallaby for a reward. Ching laughed in delight at the clever way in which he had cheated them all. But, the snake . . .

He did not know how to handle a snake. Some people can do it. . . . If he left the box in the room he feared he would be convicted, whereas if the snake were found—afterwards, it would be supposed that a reptile had just crept in, as they sometimes do. Moreover he had to choose his moment very cleverly, the moment, perhaps, when they were all at dinner, and when the amah had finished putting away her mistress's things. . . .

He had postponed dealing with his desire too long. Whose fault? The amah's fault. That brown barbarian was always watching him,

always. He would make a great effort, *now*. He took the box from under his bed and looked dubiously at it. Better perhaps to see if the way was clear. So he put the box under the bed again and went towards the house.

They were dining earlier to-night because of the dance. Some time, while the guests were arriving, he would put the snake in the unsealed box in the room of the young man "beautiful as a Malay," by the young man's bed perhaps. He looked into the dark room. He would have to be very swift when the time came. He must make no mistake. No one must catch him with the box. While he thought this he drew his breath in suddenly for he heard a movement. An evil spirit? Taking his knife from his pocket he held the blade before him, for it is well known that spirits are afraid of pointed steel.

"Murderer!" It was only the amah after all. Ching flung his left arm round her, and with his right hand he caressed her bare flesh with the blade of his knife.

"Female devil!" he hissed, "you feel the edge of the knife."

"Infidel, I will cry loudly, and then they will all run to see the blade of your knife."

"You dare not, you are in his room."

" And *you* are in his room—why ? "

" Because I will kill him even as I said."

" You shall not kill him, for reasons that I know of."

" I do not ask for your reasons, I do not believe in them,"

" Dog ! Leave this room ! "

" Malay girl, you love the young man, but I do not understand love. Hate only I know, and I hate you. I would that I could put thorns under your eyelids, that I could see you fast-bound with strong cords, while hour by hour and day by day water dripped on your head from a utensil above until you were mad. There are magicians in our country who can shrink your body until it is only three inches high ; they can paralyse it while yet it retains life. As a small statue I would put you on a shelf and daily I would torment you. I would spit on you even as you spat on me."

" Ah ! how you love one, boy."

" Love," said Ching, " love ! you female devil."

At that moment he released her, because someone called : " Amah ! Amah ! "

" Always they call me now in this house," said the Malay girl annoyed at the interruption,

" never is there a moment for peace or amusement. I shall not stay much longer in this place."

" I shall not stay either," said the boy, " we will go together."

" Then, if you go, I stay, and you cannot kill the young man," said the amah scornfully ; " he is in the dining-room. And I will see to it, boy, that you are occupied all the rest of the evening. You shall find no chance to kill him. I will have you thrashed, if I find no other way."

" I am no butler," said Ching, " I cannot pour out drinks and wait upon people. I am a house-boy, and you are not my mistress."

" We will see," said the amah, and she went in response to the summons.

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Meanwhile the Royal Red Fusiliers band tuned up their instruments.

" That music," said the old p  wang discontentedly, " is of the sort rather to entice evil spirits hither than to drive them away."

" It is you who must drive them away," said the cook, now resting from his labours and drinking " whisky-soda."

The p  wang, who had tasted many strange dishes, including a melting P  che Melba was

feeling rather out of sorts. That may have accounted for the unusual depression which overcast his optimistic interest in everybody's business. He was unable to listen to the tales either of Haji or the butler. Instead, he chanted softly some incantations. Presently he stopped and began to wail.

"It is too late, too late," he intoned. "The evil spirits work out their will. Ah! why was I not allowed to draw them away before this? I see, I see, I see."

"Stop it, old fool," said the cook.

Happily this had some effect on the p^hawang, for he began putting curses on the cook, whose mentality, however, was impervious to anything a Malay might work in the way of magic, even with hostile intent to himself. Haji, who also kept his tongue in his cheek with regard to spirits and devil-raising, was anxious only on one score :

"Rendell will hear," he said ; he will come out and make things unpleasant ; so be quiet, O p^hawang. Have you seen the new dances? The butler and I will show you one of the new dances." Catching hold of the butler, he moved him (nothing loth) round the compound in an exaggerated imitation of the fox-trot.

"The girl should not be allowed to see this," said the p^hwang, referring to the amah. But the girl laughed in derision both of the dances and of the dancers, as well as of the old magician's prudery.

"The red-haired girl has not come to-night," commented the butler.

"The young man Logan leaves in the car presently. He is going to Singapore," said Haji.

"Why?"

"I have not been able to find out," said Haji. "It may be he and the red-haired one are going together. I hear they are to marry."

"They—to marry!" ejaculated Ching.

"What is it to you, young infidel?"

"They will not marry," retorted the house-boy.

"He speaks truly," declared the p^hwang, for once in accord with the Chinese boy, "they will not marry. Another woman will marry the young man—a darker woman—at least she will try to marry him."

"A dark woman!" echoed the amah.

"I see her surrounded by a purple cloud," chanted the p^hwang. "I see many things, but the cook will not allow me to make my incantations."

"Why do you not leave him alone," the Malay reproached the cook.

"He said the evil spirits were gone," said the cook. "What more would you have? And the noise he makes is horrible."

"Do not heed him," said the amah, "but tell me of the dark woman."

"What is she to you, girl?"

"I am curious, that is all."

But the pâwang had no more to say about the dark woman. There were too many interruptions. The hostility of the cook had upset him.

"There will be death, two deaths," he prophesied.

"Who will die?" asked the Chinese boy, folding his arms with a look of intense satisfaction. In his mind he envisaged the young man "beautiful as a Malay" agonised in the throes of the quick poison of snake-bite. It made him feel that he was a man, if he encompassed the death of that creature the brown girl loved.

"Ah," said the butler, "you said these people would be sorry they came."

"They will not be sorry in the end," said the pâwang.

"But if there is death?"

"Did I say *whose* death?"

"No, because you cannot say whose," said the cook.

This silenced the old magician for a few moments because it was more or less true. His vision was faulty. Though he was undoubtedly a psychic, his methods were clumsy, and what with drugs, ignorance and wickedness, he was liable, at the best, to misinterpret what he saw.

"Give me whisky-soda," he said.

"I will do so," said the cook, "if you will cease that noise. We have had enough. If the evil spirits are not gone, let them stay. I, for one, prefer them."

The pâwang looked sulky, but he desisted and drank his "whisky-soda" in silence. Presently the cook retreated into his own domain to superintend the turning out of jellies and creams for the buffet, which was splendidly arranged in the dining-room. The pâwang, inspired by the unaccustomed dose of alcohol he had consumed, began to beat the floor as though it were an imaginary drum and to intone *sotto voce* in tune to it. He had for his audience now only the amah and the house-boy who gazed at the girl as though trying to read her thoughts. The amah stared at the pâwang, but her thoughts were not with him. She was wondering who the dark woman was

who intended to try to marry the young man "beautiful as a Malay." She did not feel jealous, because an idea had entered her mind—a wild idea, but not entirely one of unreason. Patrick had smiled at her in the afternoon. She had taken in the tray with his cocktails on it at half-past five. It was not her business to enter his room, but the butler was busy and she would not trust the house-boy. And the tenderness of her manner had evoked the smile. Really he was very much amused. In spite of his own troubles, the idea of his attraction for this brown beauty made him irresistibly inclined to giggle. Hence the encouraging smile, which was really a repressed giggle. But the Malay girl remembered that sometimes—often, too often—Englishmen smile at Malay girls. . . .

"*A year's drought is washed away by a day's rain,*" she thought, drawing on her stock of proverbs. If he were really going away as was rumoured, there would be no Harbury to keep his attention. Haji said he was going to drive to Singapore, which was about thirty miles away, and that in the morning he would catch a boat. It was to be kept secret from everyone else. The Malay girl conceived the plan of waylaying the car on the road. He had smiled at her,

In her country divorce was easy, and cheap. Many ladies married three, four, even five or six times. The amah was only an amah—and marriage? Even the dominating English were neither so lucky nor so very particular about marriage. The girl decided that marriage was not only out of the question but entirely unnecessary. She wondered if he would give her a long satin jacket fastened together with gold brooches. She wanted jewelled, instead of gilded, pins for her hair. She wanted a new sarong. She wanted a box of that lovely rosy dark Rachel powder her mistress kept in a porcelain basin covered with a silver lid on her lacquer dressing-table. There was an enormous puff in the box with a blue silk handle. The amah had used it every day of late, and her mistress had complained that the powder went very quickly. It came periodically from Paris with a number of dresses. From the Malay girl's point of view the dresses were ugly and unmeaning. Some of them were indelicate. She thought of a girl from the district of Prang who now lived with a young Englishman in a bungalow at Port Harrison. She was happy. She had everything she wanted. It is true that, when friends came in a party to visit the young Englishman, the Malay girl

was hidden away. But what of that? Who wanted to meet parties of English people?

Some of these dreams wrote themselves in smiling colour over the girl's face, and Ching, who was watching her, interpreted them in his own manner. He did not clearly decipher their meaning, but he was aware of an intense irritation. He began drumming with his feet a measure in tune to the p^{aw}wang's rhythm. Presently with great force he brought his h^{ee}l down on the amah's foot—one, two, three, until she yelled with pain.

The p^{aw}wang stopped.

"How they bother me, these fools," said the cook to his assistant.

"Could I help her foot?" protested the boy to Haji, who came to see what was the matter, "it was in my way; the p^{aw}wang made music, and I beat time with my feet."

"He is so fond of music, this young infidel," gasped the girl. Here is music for you, boy," and with her nails she made three long scratches on his cheek.

"Wild cat, panther!" howled Ching. "Once more you hurt me, but ah! h^{ow} I will hurt you yet!"

"He will do that," wailed the p^{aw}wang. "Now

I know, I know, I know. These two, these two these two," he chanted louder and louder, until Haji, fearful of the master of the house, clapped his hand over the old man's mouth.

"Give him another whisky-soda," said the cook.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DANCE

ANNABEL'S dance began so well that she almost forgot its success had been threatened earlier in the day. Everything went with a wuzz, as she expressed it. She saw surprise and admiration in the eyes of the "Government crowd," and realised with delight that she had added to her circle of male admirers—added also to her circle of female critics—but then, as Annabel cheerfully told herself, there were no women in the whole Province—only cats.

"The gods love me, after all," she remarked to her husband in a brief interval of her triumphant progress.

"Gods!" echoed Jim, "you've got a swollen head."

"Where would you be without me?" asked Annabel.

"I know where I'd like to be at the present

moment," grumbled Jim. "I'd like to be in bed."

"How literal you are," sighed Annabel. "I mean that without me you'd be nowhere on the social ladder, and all the gratitude I get is to be told I've got a swollen head—no, don't argue, I know you come of an old family, and all that, but who would believe it if you sit about in pyjamas in your off-hours. You might just as well be a miner or any old thing, if you spend all your time either working or in bed; no—by the way, where's Patrick?"

Jim did not reply to this question. In the morning, when Patrick's departure was a *fait accompli*, he would inform Annabel—in his experience she did not give way to hysteria unless something was to be gained thereby, and no amount of hysteria would bring back Patrick once he was embarked. . . . In the morning, therefore, explanations would be easy; meanwhile :

"Aren't you rather neglecting Rose Harbury?" he suggested. Annabel followed the direction of his eyes, and perceived Rose fanning herself in superb isolation.

"I'll leave her to you, Jim."

She had seen a new admirer coming towards

her, a Captain Petherington-Withers, and was preparing to radiate a smile when Jim with unnecessary alacrity intercepted him, led him away in the opposite direction, and presented him to Rose.

Captain Petherington-Withers bowed respectfully to Lady Harbury. A fine woman without doubt, but, he had heard, something of a blue stocking. Also, it was rumoured that her husband inclined to shoot anyone who looked at her. He determined not to look too long, besides his own taste was for the Annabel type . . . a ravishing little bit. What did one say to the Harbury sort? What *did* one say? He pulled at the thin pencilled line on his short, upper lip.

"D'you like life?" he asked.

"Life?" echoed Rose.

"Life," reiterated the Captain, nervously.

Rose stared at him, laughed wildly, and walked away.

Captain Petherington-Withers stood frozen with surprise for a few moments. He was relieved to find conversation on a high plane was not demanded of him; and yet——

"These brainy women!" he murmured.

Meanwhile, poor, brainy Rose went out into

the portico, among the palms and ferns. She found difficulty in breathing. The three yellow ostrich feathers which served her as a fan only disturbed hot air which threatened to choke her. It was dreadful, and once she had thought the climate—the heat of it—exaggerated.

At this moment Patrick approached her. He looked gloomy, haggard and pale.

“I am come to say good-bye,” he said.

“Good-bye!”

“I can hardly expect you to be sorry.”

“I *am* sorry,” declared Rose, “I am sorry about everything . . . it seems to be all my fault, everything which has happened . . . but oh! Patrick, do not make things worse—why are you saying good-bye? You are not going to do something dreadful, are you?”

“Something dreadful,” repeated the young man, “I confess that it never occurred to me to do something dreadful—if by that you mean an act of violence—to myself or to another.”

Rose Harbury fanned herself vigorously. The air seemed suddenly hotter—or was it cooler?

“I am glad,” she said, “that you can be romantic, without being silly.”

Patrick looked on the ground.

“Cruel!” he murmured.

"Not so cruel as you could be, as you would be——"

"As I would be——?"

"If *I* were silly as well as romantic."

"Perhaps we're neither of us romantic enough to be silly—and happy," he returned.

"Can't we be happy without being silly?" asked Rose, "but I see you are worried about time," for Patrick had looked at his watch.

"I'm not exactly worried about time," he replied, "though I suppose I had better not keep the car waiting. You see, a boat sails in the morning, so I am going to Singapore to-night. The car is waiting at the end of the drive, so that I shall get off without creating a sensation. I seem to have made an awful mess of things, what with that amah girl, and——"

"Me, and Gerald, and—oh, Patrick, it is *we* who should go, in fact we *are* going—to Hong Kong. Wait, and I will pack up and go to-morrow. Besides, there is Raymonde."

"She doesn't come into it at all—I *must* say good-bye."

He stood up.

"I'm not keeping you," protested Rose.

He sat down again.

"It is myself I must urge. Do you imagine

that I want to leave this golden land? *The Golden Chersonese*, as Ptolemy called it. London will seem such a dingy anti-climax."

"And in London there is——"

"Violet!" Patrick frowned, he bit his lip.

"We must forgive ourselves some things," said Rose, kindly.

"But, if they don't forgive us?"

"They wouldn't anyhow—I mean Violet. Could you expect her to forgive you for being on another plane? A long enough silence, and she will gradually forget."

"Ah! that silence; and yet words are so brutal when you try to kill love with them. I wrote her a letter, but now I have torn it up—I shall owe her a debt. How and when will it be repaid?"

"It will not be repaid by your marrying her and making her unhappy——"

Patrick laughed, a bitter laugh.

"I wasn't going to, anyhow," he said, candidly, "and now—I really must——"

Tears came into the eyes of Rose. "I hate saying good-bye to anything or anybody," she said.

"Ah!" said Patrick, with a bleak smile, "*anything or anybody*. You have a kind heart, dear Rose, but you *do* hurt; we should never have got on together—I should have had to

forgive you too often—but I shall always love you . . . and I shall never marry.”

“I didn’t mean,” began Rose.

“No, dear, you never mean anything,” said Patrick—and so . . . He kissed her hands :

“Good-bye, dear lady of yesterday and tomorrow ; we shall meet again.”

“In London ? ”

“——In Paradise. . . .”

“It is an impossible world,” said Rose to herself ; things begin well and end badly, and if they begin well, anyhow they end.” She wished she could drown her reflective soul in the aphrodisiac music of the dance, but the gayest rag-time or jazz only stimulated pangs of sentimentality. So she continued to sit alone. She wished that Gerald would come and sit with her. He created an atmosphere in which problems ceased to be—or, at least, they ceased to trouble. Perhaps that was the place they ought to occupy in one’s mind, consigned to a sort of spiritual ante-room of the plane, where they could be settled easily. The difficulty was, to occupy one’s mind. If one didn’t dance, or drive, or drink, or shoot, or work hard for one’s living, the unoccupied something in one’s mind emerged

from the stagnation, and peered about looking for trouble, as Gerald would say. There were, of course—flirtations, a very popular way of killing time, but Rose decided that her friendship with Patrick could not possibly be called a flirtation. They really were *en rapport*; they really did care for the same things. If only—it occurred to Rose that the psycho-analyst could have helped her to some insight regarding her own feelings, but she quickly banished the thought, considering that she would prefer to remain in the romantic regions of “phantasy” rather than be dragged on to the cold, dry levels of what they called “reality.” Nevertheless she realised that the regions of phantasy were rather dark; there was no light there by which she might see the reflection of her soul. And she had a great curiosity to see her own soul “as in a mirror.” But perhaps it was better to remain mysterious and hidden, in case that reflection should be disappointing. Moreover, others might also see her true self reflected “as in a mirror.” That thought was intolerable. “To see ourselves as others see us!” Then, though she could not see herself, Rose suddenly obtained a flash of the vision of Annabel, of Jim, of Gerald. . . .

She wanted to hide from everyone. Would

everyone—anyone—well! would Gerald wonder where she was if she spent the rest of the evening in her room?

She went through the archway which led to the steps and on to the veranda.

All the reed blinds were raised in order to allow an improbable current of cooling air to drift round and through the rooms, and this enabled Rose to see a figure creeping along at the further end of the veranda. She stood still to watch its stealthy movements. . . . Remembering the amah's frantic gestures in regard to Patrick's room she wondered. . . . Was Patrick really gone? Impulsively she started in pursuit of the figure. . . .

The Chinese cook fanned himself and anathematised the house-boy.

"Where is the young fool?" asked the butler.

"Doubtless your pâwang can tell you," sneered the cook.

The old villain, who sat propped against the wall in a semi-intoxicated trance, lifted open heavy eyelids: "I see, I see," he muttered thickly.

"You see what you want to see," declared the cook.

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The pâwang relapsed into the unconscious again.

"You are hard on him," said the butler.

"You gave him the whisky-soda to keep him quiet, and now he is quiet—but the things he said have come to pass."

"As much love and hate as are to be found anywhere," said the cook.

"But the young man is gone, as he said."

"As he said, after he knew."

"And the Lady Harbury is gone, too."

"How do you know?" asked the cook.

"I have seen her sitting with the young man. He kissed her hands; then he went away. Then *she* went away. She is no longer to be seen among the guests."

"Well!" shrugged the cook, "what would you expect? Their morals naturally follow their manners."

CHAPTER XXIII

UNPREMEDITATED

As Patrick strolled down the drive towards the car which awaited him, he congratulated himself that he had really got off without anything sensational happening. But just as he came in sight of the gate he stopped short.

"Life is full of surprises here," he said to himself, "what am I in for now?"

Some yards ahead of him a white figure floated among the trees. It seemed to be dancing, coquetting with its own shadow, and evidently it had wings, gauzy wings, seeming to flap rather vainly in the still air. A phantom? an elemental? one of the pâwang's evil spirits? Was an evil spirit ever white—a filmy feathery thing exulting in the moonlight? Perhaps it was a fairyish creature—but they were mischievous—he remembered an old tale of a fairy that enticed a Scotch laird by walking before him on the brow

of a hill, assuming the form of a beautiful woman wearing a green veil, and waving and looking over her shoulder, and smiling, and always walking before him, though the laird pursued her hard. When he did catch up, she vanished, and the laird fell into a bog or a river or something, and was drowned. He had committed a crime against love, and poetic justice had selected him for punishment. Patrick stood still and watched, with some misgiving, the figure dancing between him and his escape. He felt very desolate, he had cut his cables, before him stretched a long journey which is always an adventure since its potentialities are unknown, and at that moment he had a sort of prevision that he was not destined to go on his journey. Then he reassured himself. *He* had not committed a crime against love. Like Darius, the "captain of the ships," it could be said of him, "*never woman mourned for deed of his*"; though there was—Violet; she had shed tears, but then she was silly, he had been cruel in order to be kind, she could never have been happy with him, he had to forgive himself about Violet, he refused to suffer poetic justice because of Violet. . . .

The white figure floated out into the drive, and walked towards him. It had red hair.

"Little Ginger," said Patrick, "well!"

He lit a cigarette, realising that his nerves had been rather unstrung.

They met and stood staring at each other.

Raymonde was dressed in white, she wore large pearls, and a silvered scarf which could be made to look like wings if she held the ends, and moved in rhythmic measure.

Her hair looked like an aureole of gold.

"Moon-walker," said Patrick.

"Moon-dancer if you please, the moon always makes me feel as though I could burst out of my body; does it make you feel like that?"

"Not exactly, but I understand what you mean."

"How nice to be understood," said Raymonde reflectively.

"One rarely is, you know," declared Patrick.

"Not even you?" she looked at him considering.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Patrick—"you look most gloriously beautiful."

Raymonde's lips parted in a happy smile.

"I'm awfully fond of hearing things like that," she said, "you also——"

"Don't for heaven's sake tell me I look beautiful," begged Patrick.

"I won't, it *is* rather soppy—I called you a milksop once."

"The devil you did."

"I did, I hadn't made up my mind to marry you then, I shouldn't have done it if I had."

Patrick drew a long breath. He had forgotten all about that bargain. And now he was full of consternation. . . .

"What are you thinking about now?" asked the girl.

"I was thinking about your hair, that glorious Titian gold."

Raymonde beamed.

"Your own hair is rather nice," she said, "I love the way it grows off your forehead."

Patrick vaguely remembered someone else having said these same words—but it was a long time ago. . . . The spell of the East was very strong to-night . . . and added to it was the spell of the tropical plants . . . and the spell of youth, and of red hair. But what was the use of it? There was a motor-car waiting for him at the gate.

That was a hard fact and Raymonde must be told of it.

"I've got to go," he told her.

"And why pray?"

"You see I fell foul of Gerald Harbury——"

"Oh that, but where are you going? for how long?"

"Only for a few days—to Singapore," said Patrick hastily.

Raymonde frowned.

"What about me?" she plaintively asked.

"I love you."

"When did you find that out?"

"The first afternoon I saw you, when I told Lady Harbury your hair was not 'ginger,' but Titian gold."

(And he never even stammered over this statement.)

"You oughtn't to have told her that," said Raymonde, "you made her jealous. P'raps she was jealous about him too—her husband, I mean, I believe she took a turn with you out of pique—he made love to me, you know."

"I didn't know," said Patrick, "the black-guard!"

"Not at all," said Raymonde, "I encouraged him."

"Why did you?"

"Bored, must do something; there isn't always a full moon."

"How can I go," said Patrick, "and leave you at his mercy?"

"You can bet your boots you'll leave me at no one's mercy but my own. All the same I don't want you to go, in fact if you leave me in the rut I've been in—have you seen my father? Have you seen my mother? Have you seen Miss Chapman?"

"I have."

"Then you've seen a rotten lot, aren't they now? I can tell you they gave me a time between them. They made me desp'rit; when they said I was a little mad, I played up, so's I could be as wicked-as-wicked, without being blamed. Poor Raymonde wasn't responsible you see; not that I've been *very* wicked," added the girl—"but I will be."

"No, you won't," declared Patrick, "I won't let you."

"How are you going to prevent it?" asked Raymonde.

"I'll punish you, I'll kiss you."

He put his arms round her.

"I like being kissed," said Raymonde.

"By me."

"Oh, I never miss a chance," said she, "don't look so cross, there are precious few of them,"

"You mustn't kiss people," said Patrick disapprovingly.

"Well it's up to you to see that I don't."

"*I'll* see to it," said he viciously. "I'll never let you out of my sight."

"Not even when you're in Singapore?"

He looked at his watch.

"Five minutes more," he said gloomily.

Raymonde perceived that he really meant to go. She began to cry.

Patrick could not bear to see her cry. He comforted her as well as he knew how, and kissed her again and again until presently she stopped crying—and he continued to comfort her, though he had kissed all the tears away. Then she began to laugh and he kissed the laugh out of being. . . .

But there was a motor-car at the gate.

"What in heaven's name are we to do?" asked Patrick in an agonised voice.

"Do!" echoed Raymonde, "why get into your car of course, and drive away."

"Where to?"

"Oh! any old where"—Raymonde clapped her hands, "an elopement! glory. What rats they'll all be in, my father will have a fit, 'til he knows we really have got a special licence and all that."

" You've got no proper clothes, darling ; hadn't we better drive to your home and get——"

" No fear," objected Raymonde, "*you've* got clothes, haven't you ? "

" Do you propose to borrow them, dear ? "

" Of course not, but you can go out in the morning at Singapore, can't you, and get me what I want ? "

" She *is* clever," said Patrick, kissing her again.

" Don't waste time now we've decided," said Raymonde anxiously.

" Come then," said Patrick, taking her hand. . . .

The pâwang open his drugged eyes and stared dully before him. The effects of the whisky-soda were beginning to wear off. He opened his mouth——

" If you say those words I see," threatened the cook, " I will deprive you of your speech for ever."

" You would not dare," protested the pâwang feebly.

" Would I not dare ? " repeated the cook, " are you in such favour with Rendell ? I have heard him say you deserve death."

" What he says is of small import," declared

the pâwang, "he has a kind heart though his tongue is bitter."

"I have not found his tongue bitter," declared the other in a satisfied voice, "but then I am a cook."

"You are a cook," chanted the pâwang coaxingly, "therefore be kind to the hungry."

"Hungry!" said the cook, "why you have eaten enough to satisfy a water buffalo."

"Perhaps he means he is thirsty," suggested the butler, who came on the scene at this juncture.

"My throat is parched," moaned the pâwang, "my eyes are leaden, my head burns."

"Give him beer," said the butler.

"I will accept no responsibility for this old man," said the cook. "If I gave him beer he might die on the premises, even during the dance."

"I will remove him if he dies," promised the butler.

"I shall not die," protested the pâwang, "I shall not die."

"If the beer will shut his mouth," said the cook, "then give him beer."

The beer, however, rather revived the pâwang. He began muttering his incantations—under his breath.

"The young man really is on the way to Singapore," remarked the butler casually.

"He is not on the way to Singapore," contradicted the pâwang.

"This is the result of the beer," grumbled the cook.

"But the car is gone," urged the butler.

"The car is gone, yes the car is gone," intoned the pâwang.

The cook brandished a utensil.

"But the young man is not gone to Singapore," insisted the magician.

"Where is he, O pâwang?" asked the interested butler.

"It is not clear."

"And the dark woman?"

"There are several dark women."

"But the dark woman you said he would marry, is it the lady Harbury? it would seem that she is gone with him."

"She is not gone with him," said the pâwang, "and I said nothing about a dark woman."

"But yesterday—no it was to-night."

"It is only what I say *now* that matters."

"*Now* you see the worth of his magic," sneered the cook.

At this the pâwang became very wide awake.

"You do not understand," he said, "the forms move ever in a vibration. The light changes and shimmers and shifts. And into this light where the future is revealed come pictures of the past, and there are forms of thought and the lightning destroyers of desire."

"Even so," said the cook, "so may we all surmise with equal truth or error."

"I do not surmise," wailed the pâwang, "I see, I see, I see."

CHAPTER XXIV

LOVE AND HATE

THE figure Lady Harbury had seen creeping along the veranda was the figure of Ching, the house-boy. He carried the lacquer box, in which was the snake. He did not know how to handle the snake, and he was rather afraid of it. He wondered if it would dart out at him when he opened the lid of the box, or if it would continue to sleep. How venomous were snakes!—why were they venomous? He wished the magician had sold him some other means of dealing death. But perhaps it was as well, for no one would suspect him; they would think the reptile had crept in from outside. The thing he must be careful about was, that the young man “beautiful as a Malay” died of snake-bite, and not Ching, the house-boy, who had always feared these creatures since one day in the jungle. He remembered it was because of that day that he had become a house-

boy instead of a coolie in the rubber-fields. With many others he had helped in the work of clearing the jungle for the planting of rubber. When he was very tired, he had gone to sleep for five minutes, sitting straight up on the stump of a tree. And then he had opened his eyes quickly, because a breath of wind had blown across his knees—or some leaves were blown across his knees. But there was no wind. A snake had travelled across his knees, just as it would have travelled across the stump of the tree. They were such quick, slithery things, light and cold like consolidated air. He must be very careful with the snake in the lacquer box. . . .

Ching was standing in the middle of the room, when he heard footsteps on the veranda. Doubtless the foreign devil coming to his room. Quick as lightning the Chinese boy opened the lid of the box face downwards and fled. He had escaped with the empty box, and the snake was in the room behind him.

Ching went out through the door, along the passage, through the side entrance of the lounge and across the garden to the compound. A house-boy entering or leaving the house was a natural phenomenon, but he had to pass the cook on the way to his room. The Chinese cook was

not without feelings of partiality for the Chinese house-boy, and he was interested in his doings.

"Boy," he said, "what have you in that lacquer box?"

"I do not know what is in the box," returned the boy. "It is the amah's box. Where is the amah?"

"I have not seen her for some time, but is the moon eclipsed, boy, because she is not here?"

"I know nothing of the moon and its eclipses," replied the boy. "I seek the amah. I desire to return her box."

"What is this matter of a box?" queried the cook. "I advise you to have no dealings with this amah. She boasts that you love her, and you are too young for love."

"Love!" cried the house-boy, "you all speak of love, when it is hate only that I know."

"It is much the same thing," proclaimed the cook. "Boy, I would rather see you drunk with whisky-soda than drunk with love or hate. Besides, the girl is a black-faced barbarian."

"Aha! you hate her, too," said Ching.

"I hate!" said the cook. "No, boy; I love myself too well to hate another."

"You are wise as Confucius himself," sneered Ching.

He departed, and the cook watched him until he was out of sight. With the butler and the p  wang he had entered into a conspiracy of silence concerning the departure of the young man "beautiful as a Malay." He wondered how the boy and the amah would act once the disturber of the peace was well out of the way. But it was no use wondering. "Better be civil to the kitchen god than to the god of the inner sanctum," piously he quoted Confucius.

Meanwhile Ching threw the lacquer box under his bed, and gave it a vicious kick as well. He wanted to torment the amah ; he wanted to show her the empty box ; but he would not tell her—yet. Perhaps he would not tell her at all. She might accuse him ; she might get him punished. Would they punish him on suspicion ? Even if they did, it would be worth while. . . .

He began to wonder why the girl was not watching him. A misgiving crept into his mind. Once more he went in search of her.

"Have you seen the amah ? " he demanded of Haji.

"Why should I see her ? I am not her lover."

The Chinese boy showed his teeth. He was torn with passion at which others grinned and

mocked. He also would grin and mock—presently. *He* would show them——

“What is the matter with you, boy; are you possessed by a devil?”

“I am possessed by a devil!” Ching hissed.

“Yes, I am possessed by a devil.”

He flung himself on the valet and a terrible struggle ensued.

“Take your nails out of my neck,” gasped Haji, “and I will tell you about the amah.”

The nails relaxed.

“The young man,” said Haji, “left for Singapore an hour ago, and I think that girl has gone after him.”

The Chinese boy dropped his hands to his sides, and stared at the valet.

“*Gone!*”

“What is it to you?” asked Haji irritably.

Without another word Ching sprang like a panther across the compound. . . .

The road to Singapore curved in a long detour from the gate of Jim Rendell’s grounds before it crossed the bridge of the Gwala River, which could be reached by a path through the shrubs and trees. This way Ching instinctively knew the Malay girl had gone. And this way verily she went, dressed in her best sarong.

Soon she became aware that someone pursued her. She started to run, but the path was winding, the growth was thick, prickly plants tore at the silk of her sarong as though to detain her, and they scratched her soft arms so that they bled. Moreover her pursuer was more fleet than she.

"Ha, devil," he panted, "so you have spoiled my plan ; I will spoil yours."

The amah stopped, she temporised. "What plan, boy?" I have no plan—you speak in riddles."

"You warnēd him."

"Who?" she spoke breathlessly, the time was short.

"If you have no plan," asked Ching, "why are you here? shall I walk with you?"

"I would rather walk alone," declared the amah meekly.

"I do not choose that you shall walk alone."

The amah's temper rose.

"This is an outrage," she cried, "you shall suffer for it—to-morrow."

"To-morrow," said Ching wildly, "you speak rashly of to-morrow. He flourished his knife. The amah shivered at the sight of the blade. . . . Her ears sensitized by fear heard the distant sound of an engine—she began to run. Ching

sprang after her, but she ran as though her feet were winged, and she was within sight of the bridge, and on the brink of the river, when the boy caught her and flung her on the bank. He seemed possessed of superhuman strength and he looked devilish as one of the p^hawang's evil spirits might have looked. The Malay girl looked up at him entreatingly:

"Let me go," she begged, "I will be kind, I will be kind."

But the Chinese boy looked down on her with implacable unblinking eyes.

"Do I ask you to be kind?" he snapped, "*kind!* I *hate* you."

"No, you love me," she contradicted him, "but you do not understand."

She raised her brown arm towards him, a heavy chased silver bangle she wore above the elbow attracted his attention.

"That is a Chinese bracelet," he said, "it is not for you, black devil."

"It was given to me by one of my lovers," she taunted him.

"Lovers!" the Chinese boy was beside himself. With his impassioned fingers he broke the bracelet on her arm. The amah gasped and nearly fainted.

"You have wounded me," she sobbed, "look how my arm bleeds."

Ching laughed fiendishly.

"You are indeed fair to look upon," he jeered.

The amah stood up and dried her tears with a tiny printed georgette handkerchief she had stolen from Annabel. She smoothed back her shining hair. Her fingers touched the silver pin with which she had once wounded him in the arm.

The Chinese boy turned away from her for a moment absorbed in the sight of a motor-car which could now be seen skimming smoothly along the road. With a deep sigh the Malay girl drove the pin into his shoulder.

But what avails a silver pin against the life of a panther in human form?

"I will send you to meet your lover," he shrieked, "you shall swim across the river to him—there are crocodiles—Ha! Malay girl, did you not see a crocodile in the wheel of fortune?"

With nails and teeth the girl struggled in his arms, but the boy's strength was the strength of madness. He flung her as though she was a bundle of rags into the water. The water was deep and full of mud and slime. The Malay girl swam with difficulty nearer the brink, striving to gain a hold somewhere. The Chinese boy watched

her, while a series of mixed feelings swept through his mind. She was drowning. Presently she would be gone. And something vital would be gone—something vital to him. Never would he be able to tease and wound, to surprise and torment her again. It was unthinkable. The zest would be gone from life. . . . Quickly he stepped down to the edge of the water intending to pull her out. The girl choking with slime, and fear, and fury, thought he was going to push her further in. So she caught hold of his rescuing hands and dragged him in to drown with her.

So these two fought to the bitter end, and finally died in a close embrace . . . and perhaps hate was transmuted into love at last. . . .

There are crocodiles in the river,

CHAPTER XXV

IN PATRICK'S ROOM

THOUGH Annabel had ceased to keep her eye on Rose, there was one more vigilant than she. Not that Gerald had any idea of acting as a policeman or a detective. If he had supposed that Rose really wanted to carry on an intrigue with the poetry boy, he would have been grieved and astonished, but he would have effaced himself. He felt sure she would never go too far, so why should she not have a good time, if she considered talking poetry having a good time? We all have our own ideas. Gerald was at one with Rose in her idea that manners and taste were better than morals. A moral code was a thing outside oneself. It was only too easy to lapse from a code of morals; manners and taste were different, they were ingrained, one couldn't get away from them. They made a great number of things simply impossible, things that simply weren't done. . . .

Almost he began to wish he could be included among the romantics. But no—he would have to be included among the poets, and he quite definitely did not desire that. What he desired was that Rose should love him, as much as he loved her. It was a thing he hardly dared hope for although he had boasted that he would make her love him. He had often given up hoping that she would ever really care—after all, how could she care for him? With this idea in his mind, of intention he had left her alone; now he wondered if he had left her alone too much. He had had no plan when he boasted that he would make her love him, he only felt the force within him to compel . . . perhaps he knew, subconsciously, that will and character combined are a force stronger to dominate than the intellect he revered.

Like Annabel, Gerald had not been informed of Patrick's immediate departure, and he was unaware that the young man only joined Rose, who was sitting alone among the palms and ferns, in order to say good-bye. He felt hotly angry again, he could not bear to see them together, also he could not bear not to see them, so, when he walked in the opposite direction, he felt as though strong cords were drawing him back again. But he

resisted this, and remained standing against the wall glaring in front of him.

"Why aren't you enjoying yourself?"

It was Annabel, impatient of temperamental atmospheres, who asked the question.

"I *am* enjoying myself—no end."

"You don't look it."

"I seldom betray my feelings."

"I'm not so sure," said Annabel, "why not dance?"

The band struck up an alluring one-step tune, and "Shall we dance?" he asked her.

Annabel assented nothing loth, Gerald danced well and they were soon swaying together in the cross-step movement which the Malay servants censured so severely.

"Don't grip me so hard," said Annabel, "have you got a fever, or something?"

"Something. . . ."

"I shall have to keep an eye on you," said Annabel.

"A beautiful blue eye. . . ."

"Don't you ever finish a sentence?" asked Annabel.

"Let us go and sit somewhere alone," said Gerald.

He found that he could not help seeing his wife

and Patrick when he steered Annabel down the room, and, regardless of Annabel's disappointment and her protestations that it was a treat to go round with someone who danced almost as well as herself, he dragged her with the iron grip of which she had complained into the morning-room.

"Here we are alone," he sighed in a relieved voice. Annabel stared. Was he going to start a flirtation? But no, he gazed up at the portraits of the two dogs with unpardonable interest.

"Awfully fond of dogs," he announced.

Annabel felt insulted. A man sat alone with her, and spoke of dogs; he looked at their portraits, evidently he had forgotten her existence. Annabel herself was fond of dogs, but there is a time for everything.

"They both have points," she said icily, "but Mac has a mouth like a crocodile."

"Pity."

He was obviously insensible of her displeasure. She murmured something about her other guests.

"Ain't I a guest?" asked Gerald. "How long have we been here, Annabel?"

"A solid hour."

"You mean five minutes, well make it five minutes longer; I want to tell you quite a lot of

things, I'll tell you something I've told no one else yet," he grasped at her as she tried to escape, "my uncle's dead and left me his place in Hampshire. . . . "

"What luck!" said Annabel, "and money?"

"Pots of it."

"I'll favour you with a visit next time I'm home; and now, dear Gerald, will you make allowances for your poor worried hostess?"

She slipped away and Gerald stood with his elbow on the shelf where Jim Rendell kept his pipes. How long had he been out of sight of Rose and Patrick? Five minutes or a solid hour? as Annabel expressed it. Anyhow he might as well be in one place as another. He adjusted his monocle and sauntered forth looking nonchalant enough. Rose and Patrick no longer were visible. The husband of Rose walked up and down, not so much thinking, as trying not to think. He lit a cigar and as he threw the match away he looked, for no reason, up to the veranda where Rose had seen the figure creeping stealthily. And *he* also saw a figure. The figure in the moonlight looked like Rose, but how could it be she? She would not be on that part of the veranda. . . .

He hesitated a few moments. . . .

"I shall not allow her to do anything detrimental to herself," he decided.

Rose leaned against the supporting pillar of the arch which formed the outer entrance to Patrick's room. Her face was deadly pale, her eyes closed, and she trembled from head to foot. Gerald gazed into her face, then he looked into the empty room.

"The snake!" murmured Rose.

He glanced round, at the chairs and tables on the veranda, and on the ground.

"In the room," whispered Rose.

A few yards away from them, he saw what seemed to be a dark shadow on the floor. Then he became aware that the shadow was watchful, alert, although it was still.

On the lacquer table beside him was a blotter, an inkpot, and a flat ruler, a weighty thing made of dark stone. He laid his hand on it, but Rose cried out.

"Do be quiet," he said.

"It might——"

But the thing was already done, and he flung the snake over the veranda.

Rose sat down in the wicker chair.

"It's not the first reptile's neck I've broken. Wonder how it got there?"

"Snakes," whispered Rose.

"Nasty things."

"Of all things——"

He made no reply, and she lifted her heavy lids and looked at him. His voice had been dry, icy, and the expression on his face was frozen. He was really angry with her at last. When he had shaken her it had been different—affectionate. She began to weep softly. He hated to see her cry, but he made no effort to comfort her.

"Let me suggest there may be dangers on this veranda other than snakes," he said, coldly.

Rose dried her tears—she even smiled.
"*On this veranda!*"

She was practically in Patrick's room, and she had forgotten it. Gerald, of course, did not know that Patrick was gone, but she knew it, "When he finds out," she thought.

Her smile maddened Gerald.

"I don't intend to leave you here," he rapped.

Rose stood up, but a horrible faintness overcame her. She sank on to the chair again. Gerald lifted her out of the chair and carried her into her room, and laid her on the bed. Presently she opened her eyes.

"Ah! you're better."

She rallied her forces.

"Do leave me now," she begged.

"Not call Annabel, or anybody? I'll say whatever you want me to say."

"I don't want you to say anything—why should I?"

Gerald was startled. Here was actually a faint indication of their old relation to each other; Rose spoke as though she was about to put him in the wrong again. *She* would put *him* in the wrong? The surprise had almost confused him. But he stood to his guns, as it were—he was, as she had seen, really angry this time. And if Rose couldn't volunteer an excuse, a reason, for being on Patrick's veranda he would die rather than ask her. But he would exact penance from someone.

He stood waiting, with his arms folded, "giving her a chance." But Rose did not take the chance. She rose from her bed and walked deliberately to the dressing-table and began dabbing her face with an enormous powder-puff. Then she turned round looking dignified and rather splendid, but only for a moment. She missed something—what was it?

"My fan," she gasped.

"Don't worry," said her husband, who had been following her movements with unwilling

admiration, "if it's—there, I'll get it for you."

"Thank you."

He went out of the room, and his wife stood staring at the closed door. A few words would have elucidated the situation. Why did she not say them? She was angry with herself for being unable to say them, she was angry with the occasion which had arisen making it possible for such an explanation to be necessary. Besides, she argued, Gerald ought to know—but *what* ought he to know, and why? He had compared her to a star—how——

Quite suddenly she felt a great longing to be childish, and humble, and to beg his forgiveness. He had always been so kind and forbearing—she really had tried him dreadfully. He had spoiled her, she was just a horrid, selfish thing, spoiled, just as Annabel was spoiled, as most nice-looking women are spoiled. She hated herself. With undignified haste she ran to the door, she would lose no more time, Gerald—at the door she met the butler carrying her fan. She took the fan from him, feeling as though cold water had been dashed in her face. As suddenly as the feeling of contrition had swept over her soul, so suddenly was it gone. "Never apologise,

never explain," she remembered, and it really *was* bad policy to admit one was not quite so perfect as one ought to be ; it was even a way of suggesting one's imperfections, imperfections which are only too easily discernible. She decided that nothing less than an evil spirit had tempted her to go on to Patrick's veranda, one of the spirits declared by the pâwang to haunt Bamboo Grove. What would be the next situation ?

In the tiffin room Jim Rendell was drinking long strong pegs with John Mallaby, and a few others.

" If the girl's gone with her young man for a stroll in the garden, I don't mind waiting," declared Mallaby, amicably.

Jim was looking worried. His face brightened, however, when Gerald appeared on the scene.

" Thank Heaven, she's not with you, anyhow," he said.

" To whom do you refer ? "

" To Raymonde, of course. Hush, don't let him hear. Where can she be ? "

" Maybe your Byronic relative is giving her a turn.

Jim stared at him.

" Patrick ? " Wish he was, but," lowering his

voice, "he's well on the way to Singapore by now."

"What?"

"Singapore, I said."

"The devil you did, say it again."

"Why should I?" asked Jim, testily. "I've had enough trouble, what with you, and the boy, and now that girl. Presently it'll be Mallaby. Look at him."

"He seems to be doing very well," observed Gerald, staring at the object of Jim's remark.

"Yes, but——" Jim linked his arm through Gerald's arm, and led him away a few paces. "Look at him, I say, the whites of his eyes are red, his lips are blue, and his face is grey, What about D.T.s? I knew a chap who had them for days before anyone knew, and Mallaby's eyes have the look in them of seeing millions of yellow mice about already."

"Well, it's not my trouble," said Gerald, "nor yours either that I can see."

"I've got to see that Annabel's dance isn't spoilt."

"Quite," responded Gerald.

Jim, feeling that his old friend was somehow out of sympathy with him, let go his arm and went back to the group in the tiffin room.

Meanwhile, Gerald hurried into his room and

tore off his clothes, exchanging them for a white linen suit. Seizing his topee, he literally hurled himself into the drive where John Mallaby's car was waiting. It was a fine car with powerful headlights. A silver mascot in the form of a sprite with wings outspread suggested luck. The car was for the moment unattended. Gerald got into it, a self-starter it was, and soon he was speeding down the drive.

Before he got to the gate he was aware that someone was running and shouting behind him. It was Mallaby's chauffeur. "If only that gate is open," thought Gerald. But the gate was not open, and Gerald not being able to open it in time found himself standing face to face with the chauffeur.

"Sir!"

"Well?"

"This is Mr. Mallaby's car."

"I know that," said Gerald. "I'm borrowing it. I want to go to Singapore in rather a hurry."

"Sorry, sir, Mr. Mallaby's particular about who drives his car."

"Well, you can drive me."

"But——"

"You can bring it straight back after you've landed me there."

"But Singapore is forty miles from here," expostulated the chauffeur, "and, without orders."

"You have *my* orders," said Gerald, "and what about these?" he held out a sheaf of notes.

The man looked wistfully at them.

"I'm sorry, sir." He shook his head.

"Look here, you've *got* to drive me to Singapore," said Gerald, "and in double-quick time too." He took out his revolver from his pocket.

"Get a move on!"

.

In the early dawn Annabel wept on her husband's shoulder. "I knew it was too good to last," she wailed, "I knew my dance would be spoiled."

"But it wasn't," Jim comforted her, "it was the nicest dance that ever was."

"No one will remember that," sobbed Annabel, "all they will remember is the scandal."

"There's no scandal about us."

"And John Mallaby having a fit, too——"

"He'd have had one anyhow."

"Do you think he will die?" asked Annabel.

"Just as well if he does."

"No," said Annabel, "not 'til that money affair's settled."

"How can it be, when Patrick's gone to Singapore?"

"You had no right to allow it to happen," sobbed Annabel, "look what a mess you've made of everything. Look at everything!" "Patrick gone, Raymonde gone, Ching and the amah gone, John Mallaby nearly gone, and his car quite gone."

"That last beats me," said Jim.

"And Rose——"

"Good heavens! Is she gone too?"

"I don't know," Annabel almost shrieked, "I was just going to say I haven't seen her for *hours*. Where is she?"

"Why not go and see."

Annabel sped along the passage to Rose's room. She knocked at the door, she called, but there was no answer.

"Rose, darling."

Still there was no answer, only a faint, muffled sound. Annabel opened the door and went in. She turned on the electric light.

Rose lay face downwards on the bed. She was fully dressed in the lace gown in which she had looked so handsome, but her hair fell in disarray below her waist.

"Thank heaven," said Annabel, "you're not dead."

Rose turned a tragic face towards Annabel.

"Is anyone dead?" she asked.

"I don't know, yet . . . everyone seems to have sloped off. Patrick——"

"I know about him."

"Do you?" snapped Annabel.

"He said 'good-bye' to me."

"It's more than he had the politeness to do to me, though I *was* his hostess. I wonder if Raymonde has gone off with him—or Gerald? Yes, Gerald's gone, too——"

Rose crumpled up on the bed.

There was consternation in the servants' quarters over the disappearance of Ching and the amah.

"They will come back," opined the cook.

"They will come back," wailed the p^âwang
"and you shall fly from them."

"When will they come back?" asked the butler.

"Have I not spoken truly?" shrieked the p^âwang, "did I not foresee love, and hate, and jealousy and murder? Are they not murdered, these two? Have I not already seen their ghosts all covered with blood and slime?"

"Who murdered them?"

"Like an arrow he darts through the dark water, swift upon his prey like the arrow of a giant, with his tail he lashes the waves-into a foam, his mouth is a chasm full of long pointed teeth."

"My duty is plain," declared the cook. "I shall inform Rendell that this old man has acquired what Englishmen call the 'Dee-Tees' on his premises."

The pâwang got up and staggered out of the compound.

CHAPTER XXVI

UNDERSTANDING

GERALD returned from his journey to Singapore by train. True to his promise he had sent back the chauffeur, who fully expected to be dismissed.

"You can say you were gagged and bound by a highwayman," said Gerald, "it'll be more or less true."

He had enquired for Patrick at the hotels, he had seen the boat go out of the harbour. He felt baffled and very cheap, and it was the hottest part of the day when he arrived at Bamboo Grove. However, being the after-tiffin hour, he hoped to slip in unobserved. Everyone was usually asleep at this hour, but to-day——

An exasperated Annabel met him in the lounge. Less pretty than usual she looked, her cheeks were rouged unevenly, she held a little whirring fan which disturbed the uncurled streaks of her golden hair.

"No siesta to-day?" asked Gerald, airily.

"Don't try it on," said Annabel. "Tell me where you've been all night."

"Singapore."

"Why, the doctor's gone to Singapore, after Patrick and Raymonde, they've run away."

"Together?"

"I hope so, but, much worse than that, Ching and my amah have run away, too. I'll soon get others, no doubt, but I never realised how necessary servants were about the house before, and the amah of all people—little beast."

"Perhaps *she's* gone with Patrick," hazarded Gerald.

At this juncture a chit was handed to Annabel, who almost tore it in half in her impatience to read it.

"If this isn't enough to make anybody pass out," she said. "Read it, Gerald."

The note was from Jim:

"Darling Annabel," he wrote. "Cheerio for things not being so bad after all. The sais has just come back to the office with my car. He didn't drive Patrick to Singapore, but to Kuala Lumpor, with Raymonde, where they have either got, or are going to

get, a special licence. What do *you* think ?
But these two always were off their burners.
See you presently.—JIM."

Gerald grimaced at the note.

"Poor little girl," he said.

"Poor little girl, indeed!" sniffed Annabel.
"What more can she want than a nice boy like Patrick. Poor Patrick, I think. What an artful cat! and as heartless as you make 'em, and her father may have passed out by this time—Oh! of course I haven't told you that yet—John Mallaby sprang a fit last night, of course he *does* drink—to drown the conflict, the psycho-doctor says—but *I* say he drinks, like everybody else, because he wants to. And then, what do you think? When we wanted to get him home we found someone had stolen his car."

"Not stolen," interposed Gerald, "borrowed."

"Do you mean to say you sto—borrowed it?" gasped Annabel. "And what for, may I ask? And why did you go? Why?"

"Please don't ask me any more questions, Annabel. Just forgive me—I feel most awfully let down."

He looked so miserable that Annabel melted, reflecting quickly that he *had* been let down by

Raymonde, Rose, and Patrick. Rose having been let down as well by the eloping pair—she thought—was deserving of commiseration. She therefore vented her anger on Raymonde.

“If that little cat thinks she is going to cause excitement and focus attention on herself by this—this surprising—well, she’s mistaken. *I* know. She thinks we shall all start motor-chasing them all over the Province; and I’ll see that her vanity isn’t gratified. John Mallaby’s laid up—if he isn’t dead—and I’ll see to it that Mrs. ignores them. They’ve no business to behave like this. Don’t look so glum, Gerald. You couldn’t have Raymonde yourself. . . . And don’t glare at me.”

Already the butler had found a new amah and a new house-boy in Panjang Street. He brought them into the compound and presented them to the cook and to Haji. The cook adjured the Chinese boy, the butler instructed the girl. “Above all things avoid speech with the infidel,” he advised her.

The girl stared at the boy.

“And you, boy,” said the cook, “turn away your face from the barbarian.”

The boy glanced at the girl.

"You are foolish," interposed Haji, in a low voice, "if you want to make them interested . . . "

"There is a lady in the house who is ill," said the butler, ignoring the criticism of Haji, "go you, girl, and wait upon her."

The girl regarded the butler a moment with frightened eyes; then she fled from the compound.

"Did I not say—" began Haji. "Boy, where are you going?"

"Back to Panjang Street—"

"I shall give notice," said the butler, "it is impossible for me to remain in a place where my authority is not respected. Moreover, I have no doubt that the place is infested with evil spirits—our p^{aw}ang was right, and you have driven him away," he reproached the cook.

"He is not so easily driven away," grumbled the cook, "behold him!"

The p^{aw}ang was entering the compound, and on each side of him walked the girl and the boy who had fled the moment before.

"My father with the kind heart and the bitter tongue will reward me," he said, "for I have brought these two from Panjang Street—they will serve him well."

"But I——" began the butler . . .

"I have persuaded them."

The butler was between the devil and the deep sea—he could not do other than uphold the pâwang in the presence of that grinning infidel, the cook.

"It is well, girl," pointing towards the bungalow, "your duty lies through that door—nay, first the cook will give you tea—tea for the lady Harbury."

The new amah was rather frightened of Lady Harbury. She understood that she was a very grand lady, and so evidently she was, for the girl observed that she wore a beautiful evening dress in the middle of the afternoon.

Rose had lain on her bed just as Annabel—who, as she phrased it, had tried to persuade some sense into her without success—had left her. Now she was reclining in the *chaise longue*, too listless to remove her dress. The Malay girl, who was sympathetic and who saw that the lady was very pale and obviously unhappy, put some blue silk cushions behind her head. She also brushed back the long thick coils of her hair. It was plaited into a neat arrangement, when there was a knock at the door.

The Malay girl wondered why the lady need turn so pale. The Englishman who entered the room was well-groomed, he wore a monocle, he

was nice-looking, he had a kind face. Nevertheless he frowned on her, so she slipped quietly from the room.

Rose stood up and faced her husband. She was glad she did not look so dishevelled since the girl had done her hair, but she wished she had changed her dress. Gerald stared at it.

"Dressed rather early, aren't you?" he asked. She blushed.

"I never have any idea of time."

He went close up to her. "Why were you so unhappy that you couldn't even undress?" he asked.

"*Was* I unhappy?"

He felt she was going to get the best of it. He was not strong as regards words, especially where Rose was concerned. And in that moment's hesitation he lost his advantage. With an intuition that it is the aggressor who wins, Rose attacked.

"How could you?" she said.

Gerald was taken aback, and, if speech was difficult before, it became impossible now.

"Annabel was beside herself," said Rose, indignantly. "Everything seemed to happen at once. I think she was treated very badly—everyone running away. Possibly she has for-

gotten how to take even her hair down—you know how it is here—and then, she had no idea that Patrick was going.”

“Had you?” Gerald interrupted her.

“Not till he said ‘good-bye’ to me.”

“Before the veranda episode?”

“Could it have been afterwards?”

She had done it—she had put him in the wrong.

“And now,” said Rose, “may one ask where you were all night?”

“You may ask,” said Gerald, sulkily.

“I won’t ask,” said Rose, “But oh! Gerald, how cruel it was of you——”

“Annabel has forgiven me.”

Rose burst into tears.

“I haven’t,” she said.

Gerald stared at her. This was a new Rose who cried so often. Or was she new? Perhaps he had never known her, in which case she *was* new.

Rose also considered that she had a new side of her husband to encounter. She dried her eyes, this callous, new Gerald did not care if she cried or not. He rather bore out her idea of him by saying :

“I haven’t *asked* you to forgive me.”

“Don’t.”

"The question doesn't arise."

"Perhaps it is I," said Rose, "who should ask——"

"Heavens! no," said Gerald. "I couldn't bear that."

"Why did you go away last night?" she asked.
"And where?"

He took both her hands in his.

"Why can't you love me?"

"Where did you go last night?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"It interests me."

"Interests! *Why* won't you love me?"

"If I'm interested I must care."

"Care! But *love* me."

"I do, I do," said Rose. "But let go my hands."

"Never now," he said.

"Where did you go last night?"

She tried to push him away from her, but he only laughed.

"I'm stronger than you, you see."

She slapped his face.

"Little cat."

"Where did you go?"

"You've broken my monocle."

"Tell me."

"Are you jealous? You are. That pleases me, so I will tell you. I wanted to thrash that boy, so I borrowed a car and went off to Singapore to do it. A wild-goose chase, for he'd run away in the opposite direction with, with—" he looked rather fearfully at her—"with Raymonde."

Rose laughed, a surprised but joyous laugh.

"Oh, Gerald, and I thought it was you who had—who had——"

"Then you *can* be jealous. Kiss me and promise that never again——"

Rose laid her face against his linen coat. She was thinking of Patrick's last words to her, his love of "all the ages" spoken with a tragic air which had rent her heart. Surely he had said he would never marry. She began to laugh.

"Why are you laughing?" asked her husband.

"Some things are in a 'sort of kind of' way impossible," said Rose, "and I think poets are like that. . . . Oh! Gerald, don't let me . . . beat me—sometimes. . . ."

"I will, if I think you need it," said Gerald, and then he took her unresisting in his arms, and, even as he had shaken her yesterday, so now he hugged her hard.

Annabel and Jim waited in the lounge for their

guests. Jim was very cross, because he was tired and wanted to go to bed directly after dinner, but his wife had made that impossible.

"On this night of all nights," grumbled Jim, "a dinner party."

"Only a teeny weeny one." coaxed Annabel, "only three people."

"Three's as bad as thirty when I want to go to bed, after last night, too."

"What about last night? It was the most successful dance ever given by anyone in the province, in Johore, or Singapore."

"Ending in a general *débâcle*. Where are Gerald and his wife?"

"Having a row, perhaps."

"Is there any reason why they should have a row?"

"There's always reason when you're married," said Annabel.

"Serious, though?"

"Rose was serious enough last night—suicidal even."

"Suicidal—after last night I can believe anything about anybody—this will never do—I must see to it."

"Don't," implored Annabel, "don't stir up muddy water—anyhow 'til after dinner."

"But something tragic may happen."

"I don't believe tragic things ever happen in Bamboo Grove," declared Annabel, "they only threaten to happen."

"Well, I shall go and see."

Presently Jim came back.

"Would you believe it, Annabel," he began, but somehow the bright mocking eyes of that lady disintegrated his speech.

"Well, what's the matter?"

"Oh!" said Jim, casually, "they were just forgetting that there is such a thing as time."

EPILOGUE

ONCE more the full moon gilded the night in Bamboo Grove, and the p^{aw}wang squatted in the compound of Jim Rendell's bungalow. The new amah and the new house-boy gazed at the wizard, and listened with wide eyes to his recital of the doings of their predecessors. At first glance the Malay girl resembled the one who had been before, and the boy looked like all Chinese boys. But whosoever looked a second time saw that these were tamer, gentler spirits. The p^{aw}wang made an epic out of the passion of Ching the

infidel for the amah who was of the true faith, and who, therefore, rejected the love of the infidel, preferring death. . . .

"Such nonsense," said the cook.

"I see, I see, I see," wailed the pâwang.

"You see things all wrong," declared the cook, "what of the murder? There was no murder. And jealousy? The young foreign devil and the girl with flaming hair! *There* is no jealousy. And the lady and her husband who return to their own country to-morrow. They are not sorry they came here—they are glad."

By this time Haji and the butler were added to the audience.

"Do not interfere with his visions," said Haji to the cook. "He may tell us something we want to know."

"He will tell you nothing that is true," said the cook, "though he may tell you something you want to know. Besides, he first predicts things and then causes them to happen. What did he tell you before? Love and hate, and jealousy and murder. If there was a little love it led nowhere, and hate and jealousy! These foreign devils do not know the meaning of the word 'hate.' They play and pretend. And they cannot even shoot each other successfully."

"That is true," admitted the butler. "They did not make much noise, and the shooting ended in nothing. I should have been ashamed."

"That Englishman whose gun was tampered with does not need to be ashamed," said Haji, "it was not his fault that he did not kill the young man who ran away. He had it in his mind to do it—but when one runs away——" he made a gesture of contempt.

"I see, I see, I see," moaned the pâwang.

This time the amah and the Chinese boy stared at him as though they would read the vision in his eyes.

"I see the boy and the girl," declared the wizard. "They come up together from the river. The mud of the river and the slime of the river is in their eyes and in their hair. . . ."

"But they were eaten by a crocodile," objected the cook.

"Infidel without understanding, these are not the bodies that were eaten by a crocodile, these are the finer bodies that are of the spirit of the boy and the girl."

"If they are spirits," obstinately argued the sceptical cook, "why is the slime of the river in their eyes and in their hair? Or is it the spirit of the slime that you see?"

The pâwang had no answer ready for this question, so he drummed on the floor and murmured the Sanskrit incantations. These it would seem inspired him to reply, "It is because they cannot forget the mud and the slime that it seems to stick in their eyes and hair. The crocodile they did not see, for they drowned . . . some day they will forget. They walk hand in hand round this bungalow." The amah and the Chinese boy looked about them in terror.

"I see, I see, I see," chanted the pâwang.

The amah and the Chinese boy looked at each other. Haji looked at them.

"What do you see?" he asked the pâwang, rather wearily, "love?"

"A purple shadow . . . "

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